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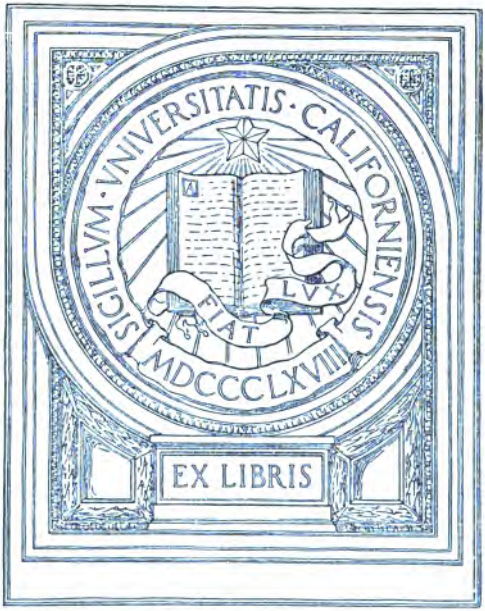

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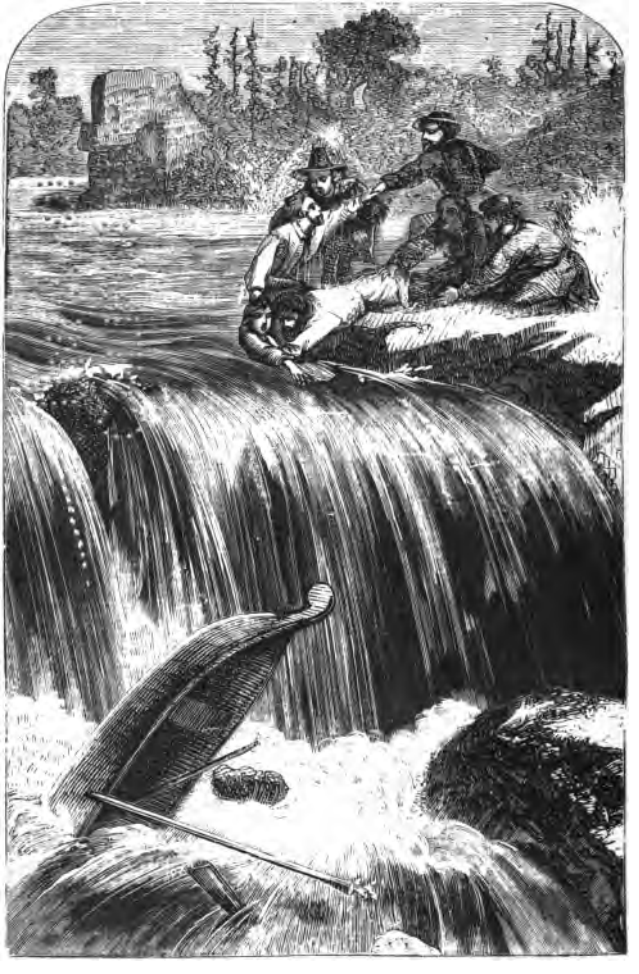

THE NARROW ESCAPE.

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THE

WILD MAN OF THE WEST.

A Tale of the Rocky Mountains.

BY

R. M. BALLANTYNE,

AUTHOR OF "THE RED BIRD," ETC.

BOSTON:
CROSBY & AINSWORTH.
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1866.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

In which the Reader is introduced to a Mad Hero, a Reckless Lover, and a Runaway Husband. — Backwoods Juvenile Training described. — The Principles of Fighting fully discussed, and some valuable Hints thrown out 9

CHAPTER II.

The Great Prairie. — A Wild Chase. — A Remarkable Accident and an Extraordinary Charger, all of which terminate in a Crash. — Bounce talks Philosophy and tells of terrible Things. — Our Hero determines to beard the Wild Man of the West in his own Den 21

CHAPTER III.

The Beauties of the Wilderness. — Portages. — Philosophy of Settling Down. — An Enormous Footprint. — Supper procured, and a Bear-hunt in prospect 42

CHAPTER IV.

Gibault has an Adventure, and discovers a very strange Creature in the Woods. — A most tremendous Bear-hunt particularly described 59

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CHAPTER V.

Fiery Remarks and Cogitations. — Round the Camp Fire. — The Artist gives an Account of Himself. — Value of a Sketch-Book. — Discoveries and Dark Threats. — The Bears'-claw Collar 79

CHAPTER VI.

The Dangers of the Wilderness. — An Unexpected Catastrophe, which necessitates a Change of Plans. — A Descent upon Robbers proposed and agreed to 98

CHAPTER VII.

A Wolfish Way of killing Buffalo described. — Bounce becomes Metaphysical on the Fine Arts. — Butchering enlarged on. — A glorious Feast, and sketching under Difficulties . . . 116

CHAPTER VIII.

A Cache discovered. — Bertram becomes valorous. — Failure follows, and a brief Skirmish, Flight, and Separation are the Results 136

CHAPTER IX.

Bounce cogitates upon the embarrassing Circumstances of his Condition. — Discovery of Black Gibault — Terrible Fate in Store for their Comrades. — A Mode of Rescue planned. — Dreadful Effects of Fire-water. — The Rescue . . . 153

CHAPTER X.

Short Treatise on Horseflesh. — Remarks on Slang. — Doings and Sights on the Prairie. — The Mountain Fort . . . 176

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CHAPTER XI.

Original Efforts in the Art of Painting. — Fur-trading Hospitality. — Wonderful Accounts of the Wild Man of the West, from an Eye-witness. — Buffalo-hunting, Scalping, Murdering, and a Summary Method of inflicting Punishment . . 191

CHAPTER XII.

An Argument on Argumentation; also on Religion. — Bounce "feelosophical" again. — A Race cut short by a Bullet. — Flight and Pursuit of the Redskins 209

CHAPTER XIII.

The Pursuit. — Conscientious Scruples of the Artist. — Strategic Movements. — Surprised in the Wild-cat Pass. — March shows Coolness and Pluck in the Hour of Danger. — A Terrific Onslaught by a Wonderful Warrior. — The Battle. — Hard Knocks and Mysterious Differences of Opinion . . 224

CHAPTER XIV.

The Hunting-ground. — How they spent the Sabbath Day among the Mountains. — Threatening Clouds on the Horizon 251

CHAPTER XV.

Business unpleasantly Interrupted. — The Mountain Fort in Danger. — Trappers to the Rescue. — A Rude Meeting with Foes in the Dark. — A Wild Race. — March meets with a Severe Misfortune 260

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI.

March gets a Surprise; more than that, he gets a Variety of Surprises. — Meets with a Strange Hunter. — Goes in a Strange Fashion to a Strange Cavern and beholds Strange Sights. — Besides other Matters of Interest 268

CHAPTER XVII.

The Vision in Leather 289

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Cave of the Wild Man of the West. — March and Mary hold Pleasant Intercourse. — Dick's Good Qualities enlarged on. — The Wild Man gives a Redskin a Strange Lesson. — A Startling Interruption to Pleasant Converse 297

CHAPTER XIX.

The Mysteries of the Cave explained. — Ingenious Devices of the Wild Man. — March and Mary besieged. — The Redskins proceed to make themselves at Home in the Cavern . . 322

CHAPTER XX.

A Gallop to the Rescue. — A Discovery. — Right-about Face. — A Disagreeable Surprise and a Sudden Ejection. — A Calm after the Storm. — Mary a Huntress. — Dick's Story of the Murdered Trapper 335

CHAPTER XXI.

March, though Willing in Spirit, finds his Body weak. — He makes Mary a Present. — The Trappers set out to search for

Digitized by Google

their Lost Comrade. — An Unexpected Meeting. — Big Waller waxes Pugnacious. — News of March. — Dick becomes more Mysterious than ever. — A Reckless Proposal and a Happy Meeting 355

CHAPTER XXII.

March Marston is perplexed, so are his Friends. — An unlooked-for Meeting. — Terrible News. — The Attack. — The Wild Man of the West once again renders signal Service to the Trappers. — Wild Doings in general, and March Marston's Chagrin in particular 371

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Wounded Fur-Trader 384

CHAPTER XXIV.

March Marston at Home. — His astonishing Behavior. — Narration of his Extraordinary Adventures. — Widow Marston's Bower. — The Rendezvous of the Trappers. — A strange Interruption to March's Narrative. — A Wild Surprise and Recovery of a Lost Lover. — Great Destruction of Household Goods. — A Double Wedding and Tremendous Excitement. — The Wild Man of the West the Wisest Man in Pine Point Settlement 399

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THE WILD MAN OF THE WEST.

CHAPTER I.

In which the Reader is introduced to a Mad Hero, a Reckless Lover, and a Runaway Husband. — Backwoods Juvenile Training described. — The Principles of Fighting fully discussed, and some valuable Hints thrown out.

MARCH MARSTON was mad! The exact state of madness to which March had attained at the age when we take up his personal history — namely, sixteen — is uncertain, for the people of the backwoods settlement in which he dwelt differed in their opinions on that point.

The clergyman, who was a Wesleyan, said he was as wild as a young buffalo-bull; but the manner in which he said so led his hearers to conclude that he did not think such a state of ungovernable madness to be a hopeless condition, by any means. The doctor said he was as mad as a hatter; but this was an indefinite remark, worthy of a doctor who had never obtained a diploma, and required explanation, inasmuch as

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it was impossible to know *how* mad he considered a hatter to be. Some of the trappers who came to the settlement for powder and lead, said he was as mad as a grisly bear with a whooping-cough, — a remark which, if true, might tend to throw light on the diseases to which the grisly bear is liable, but which failed to indicate to any one except, perhaps, trappers, the extent of young Marston's madness. The carpenter and the blacksmith of the place — who were fast friends and had a pitched battle only once a month, or twice at most — agreed in saying that he was as mad as a wild cat. In short, every one asserted stoutly that the boy was mad, with the exception of the women of the settlement, who thought him a fine, bold, handsome fellow; and his own mother, who thought him a paragon of perfection, and who held the opinion (privately) that, in the wide range of the habitable globe, there was not another like him — and she was not far wrong!

Now, the whole and sole reason why March Marston was thus deemed a madman was, that he displayed an insane tendency, at all times and in all manners, to break his own neck, or to make away with himself in some similarly violent and uncomfortable manner.

There was not a fence in the whole countryside that March had not bolted over at full gallop, or ridden crash through if he could not go over it. There was not a tree within a circuit of four

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miles from the top of which he had not fallen. There was not a pond or pool in the neighborhood into which he had not soused at some period of his stormy juvenile career, and there was not a big boy whom he had not fought and thrashed — or been thrashed by — scores of times.

But for all this March had not a single enemy. He did his companions many a kind turn; never an unkind one. He fought for love, not for hatred. He loved a dog — if any one kicked it, he fought him. He loved a little boy — if any one was cruel to that little boy, he fought him. He loved fair play — if any one was guilty of foul play, he fought him. When he was guilty of foul play himself (as was sometimes the case, for who is perfect?) he felt inclined to jump out of his own body and turn about and thrash himself! And he would have done so often, had it been practicable. Yes, there is no doubt whatever about it, March Marston was mad — as mad, after a fashion, as any creature, human or otherwise, you choose to name.

Young Marston's mother was a handsome, stout, blue-eyed, flaxen-haired woman, of a little over thirty-five summers. She was an English emigrant, and had, seventeen years before the time we write of, settled at Pine Point, on the banks of the Yellowstone River, along with her brother, the blacksmith above referred to. At

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that time she was the sweetest maiden in all the village, and now she was the handsomest matron. Indeed, the bloom of her youth remained on her cheeks so little impaired that she was often mistaken by strangers for March Marston's elder sister. The men of the place called her pretty widow Marston; but she was not a widow — at least, they had as little ground for saying that she was as they had for asserting that her son was mad. Mrs. Marston was peculiarly circumstanced, but she was not a widow.

The peculiar circumstances connected with her history are soon told. Immediately after the arrival of the blacksmith and his pretty sister at Pine Point settlement, a tall stout young stripling — a trapper — about a year older than herself, fell deeply in love with Mary West — that being Mrs. Marston's maiden name. The young trapper's case was desperate. He sank at once so deep into the profundities of love, that no deep-sea lead, however ingeniously contrived, could reach him.

Although just emerging from boyhood, Louis the trapper was already a tall, strong, handsome man, and Mary felt flattered by his attentions. But when, a month afterwards, he boldly offered her his hand and fortune (which latter consisted of a trapper's costume and a western rifle), she was taken aback and flatly refused him. Louis was hare-brained and passionate. He told her

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he would give her one day and a night to think of it. At the end of that time he came back and was again refused, for Mary West had no notion of being taken by storm in that fashion. But she trembled and grew pale on observing the storm of angry passion that gleamed from the young trapper's eyes and caused his broad chest to heave violently. He did not speak. He did not even look at Mary — had he done so, years of sorrow and suffering might have been spared them both! He stood for one moment with his eyes fixed upon the ground — then he turned, sprang through the doorway, vaulted on his horse, and went off from her cottage door as an arrow leaps from a bow. The fences and ditches that lay in his way were no impediment. His powerful steed carried him over all and into the forest beyond, where he was quickly lost to view. Mary tried to resume her household occupations with a sigh. She did not believe he was gone. But he was!

At first Mary was nettled; then she grew sad; as weeks passed away she became nettled again, and at this juncture another suitor appeared in the shape of a young immigrant farmer, whose good looks and insinuating address soothed her irritation at the strange, abrupt conduct of her lover. She began to think that she must have been mistaken in supposing that she cared for the wild trapper — and, in order to prove the

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correctness of her supposition, she married Obadiah Marston, the farmer.

Alas! poor Mary discovered her error too late. Marston turned out a profligate drunkard. At first he did not come out in his true colors. A son was born, and he insisted on calling him March, for no other reason than that he was born in the month so named. Mary was obliged to consent, and at last came to congratulate herself that the child had been born in March, and not in April or October, or any other month equally unsuitable for a Christian name. After the first year, Obadiah Marston treated his wife badly, then brutally, and at last he received a sound drubbing from his brother-in-law, the blacksmith, for having beaten poor Mary with a stick. This brought things to a climax. Marston vowed he would forsake his wife, and never set eyes on her again; and he kept his vow. He embarked one day in a boat that was going down to the Missouri with a cargo of furs, and his poor wife never saw him again. Thus was Mary West forsaken, first by her lover, and then by her husband.

It was long before she recovered the blow; but time gradually reconciled her to her lot, and she devoted herself thenceforth to the training of her little boy. As years rolled on, Mrs. Marston recovered her spirits and her looks; but, although many a fine young fellow sought her heart and

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hand, assuring her that she was a widow — that she *must* be a widow, that no man in his senses could remain so long away from such a wife unless he were dead, — she turned a deaf ear to them all.

March Marston's infancy was spent in yelling and kicking, with the exception of those preternaturally calm periods when he was employed in eating and sleeping. As he grew older, the kicking and yelling decreased, the eating increased, and the sleeping continued pretty much the same. Then came a period when he began to learn his A, B, C. Mrs. Marston had been well educated for her station in life. She had read much, and had brought a number of books to the backwoods settlement; so she gave her boy a pretty good education — as education went in those days, — and certainly a much better one than was given to boys in such out-of-the-way regions. She taught him to read and write, and carried him on in arithmetic as far as compound division, where she stuck, having reached the extreme limits of her own tether.

Contemporaneously with the cessation of squalling and kicking, and the acquirement of the A, B, C, there arose in little March's bosom unutterable love for his mother; or, rather, the love that had always dwelt there began to well up powerfully, and to overflow in copious streams of obedience and considerate attention. About

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the same time the roving, reckless "madness," as it was styled, began to develop itself. And, strange to say, Mrs. Marston did not check that! She was a large-minded, a liberal-minded woman that semi-widow. She watched her son closely, but very few of his deeds were regarded by her in the light of faults. Tumbling off trees was not. Falling into ditches and horse-ponds was not. Fighting was, to some extent; and on this point alone did mother and son seem to entertain any difference of opinion, if we may style that difference of opinion where the son fell into silent and extreme perplexity after a short, and on his part humble, discussion on the subject.

"Why, mother," said March, in surprise (having attained the mature age of eight when he said it), "if a grisly bear was to 'tack me, you'd let me defend myself, wouldn't you?"

Mrs. Marston smiled to see the rotund little object of two-feet-ten standing before the fire with its legs apart, and its arms crossed, putting such a question, and replied,—

"Certainly, my boy."

"And when Tom Blake offered to hit Susy Jefferson, wasn't I right to fight him for that?"

"Yes, my boy, I think it right to fight in defence of the weak and helpless."

The object of two-feet-ten began to swell and his eye to brighten at the unexpected success of

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this catechizing of its mother, and went on to say —

"Well, mother, why do you blame me for fightin', then, if it's right?"

"Because fighting is not always right, my boy. You had a fight with Bill Summers, hadn't you, yesterday?"

"Yes, mother."

Two-feet-ten said this in a hesitating tone, and shrank into its ordinary proportions as it continued —

"But I didn't lick him, mother, he licked *me*. But I'll try again, mother — indeed I will, and I'll be sure to lick him next time."

"I don't want you to try again," rejoined Mrs. Marston; "and you must not try again without a good reason. Why did you fight him yesterday?"

"Because he told a lie," said the object, promptly, swelling out again, and looking big under the impression that the goodness of its reason could not be questioned. It was, therefore, with a look of baffled surprise that it collapsed again on being told that that was not a sufficient reason for engaging in warfare, and that it was wrong to take the law into its own hands, or to put in its word or its little fist, where it had no right to interfere, — and a great deal more to that effect.

"But March, my boy," said Mrs. Marston,

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drawing the object towards her and patting its round little fair head, "What makes you so fond of fighting?"

"I ain't fond o' fighting, mother, but I can't help it."

"Can't help it! Do you ever try?"

"I — I — no, I don't think that I do. But I feel so funny when I see Bill Summers cheatin' at play. I feel all over red-hot — like — like — oh! you've seen the big pot boilin' over? Well, I just feel like that. An' w'en it boils over, you know, mother, it must be took off the fire, else it kicks up *sich* a row! But there's nobody to take me off the fire when I'm boilin' over, an' there's no fire to take me off — so you see I *can't* help it. Can I?"

As the object concluded these precociously philosophical remarks, it looked up in its mother's face with an earnest inquiring gaze. The mother looked down at it with an equally earnest look, — though there was a twinkle in each eye and a small dimple in each cheek that indicated a struggle with gravity, — and said, —

"I could stop the big pot from boiling over without taking it off the fire."

"How?" inquired Two-feet-ten eagerly.

"By letting it boil over till it put the fire out."

The object opened its eyes very wide, and pursed its mouth very tight; then it relaxed,

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grinned a little with an air of uncertainty, and was about to laugh, but checked itself, and, with a look of perplexity said,—

"Eh?"

"Ay, my boy," resumed the mother, "just you try the boiling-over plan next time. When you feel inclined to fight, and know, or *think* that you shouldn't, just stand quite still, and look hard at the ground,—mind, don't look at the boy you want to fight with, but at the ground,—and begin to count one, two, three, four, and so on, and I'm quite sure that when you've counted fifty the fire will be out. Now, will you try, my son?"

"Mother," replied Two-feet-ten, earnestly (and becoming at least two feet eleven while he spoke), "I'll try!"

This ended the conversation at that time, and we beg leave to apologize to our reader for having given it in such full detail, but we think it necessary to the forming of a just appreciation of our hero and his mother, as it shows one phase of their characters better than could have been accomplished by a labored description.

Before March Marston had attained to the age of sixteen he had read aloud to his mother—not once, but several times—the "Vicar of Wakefield," "Robinson Crusoe," the "Pilgrim's Progress," the "Tales of a Grandfather," "Æsop's Fables," and a variety of tales and stories and

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histories of lesser note — all of which he stored up in a good memory, and gave forth in piecemeal to his unlettered companions as opportunity offered. Better than all this, he had many and many a time read his Bible through, and was familiar with all its leading heroes and histories and anecdotes.

Thus, it will be seen that March Marston was quite a learned youth for a backwoodsman, besides being a hero and a "madman."

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RIDING A BUFFALO.

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CHAPTER II.

The Great Prairie. — A Wild Chase. — A Remarkable Accident and an Extraordinary Charger, all of which terminate in a Crash. — Bounce talks Philosophy and tells of terrible Things. — Our Hero determines to beard the Wild Man of the West in his own Den.

THE rising sun lifted his head above the horizon of the great western prairie, gilding the upper edges of those swelling undulations that bear so strong a resemblance to solidified billows as to have acquired the name of prairie-waves.

On the sunny side of these waves the flowrets of the plains were already basking in full enjoyment of the new day; on the summits only the tips of their petals were turned to gold. On the other side of those waves, and down in the hollows, every thing was clothed in deep shadow, as if the still undissipated shades of night were lingering there, unwilling or unable to depart from so beautiful a scene. This mingling of strong lights and deep shadows had the effect of rendering more apparent the tremendous magnitude of those vast solitudes.

There were no trees within the circuit of vision, but there were a few scattered bushes, so low

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and insignificant in appearance as to be quite unobvious to the eye, except when close to the feet of the spectator. Near to a clump of these bushes there stood two horses motionless, as if chiselled in stone, and with their heads drooping low, as if sound asleep. Directly under the noses of these horses lay two men, each wrapped in a blanket, with his head pillowed on his saddle, and his rifle close at his side. Both were also sound asleep.

About a mile distant from the spot on which those sleepers rested, there grew another small bush, and under its sheltering boughs, in the snuggest conceivable hole, nestled a grouse, or prairie-hen, also sound asleep, with its head lost in feathers, and its whole rotund aspect conveying the idea of extreme comfort and good living. Now we do not draw the reader's attention to that bird because of its rarity, but because of the fact that it was unwittingly instrumental in influencing the fortunes of the two sleepers above referred to.

The sun in his upward march overtopped a prairie-wave, and his rays, darting onward, struck the bosom of the prairie-hen, and awoke it. Looking up quickly with one eye, it seemed to find the glare too strong, winked at the sun, and turned the other eye. With this it winked also, then got up, flapped its wings, ruffled its feathers, and, after a pause, sprang into the air with that

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violent *whir-r* which is so gladdening, yet so startling to the ear of a sportsman. It was instantly joined by the other members of the covey to which it belonged, and the united flock went sweeping past the sleeping hunters, causing their horses to awake with a snort, and themselves to spring to their feet with the alacrity of men who were accustomed to repose in the midst of alarms, and with a grunt of surprise.

"Prairie-hens," muttered the elder of the two, — a big, burly backwoodsman, — as he turned toward his companion, with a quiet smile. "It was very thoughtful on 'em to rouse us, lad, considerin' the work that lies before us."

"I wish, with all my heart, they didn't rise quite so early," replied the younger man, also a stout backwoodsman, who was none other than our hero March Marston himself; "I don't approve of risin' till one wakes in the course of nature; d'ye see, Bounce?"

"I *hear;* but we can't always git things to go 'xactly as we approves of," replied Bounce, stooping down to arrange the embers of the previous night's fire.

Bounce's proper name was Bob Ounce. He styled himself, and wrote himself (for he could write to the extent of scrawling his own name in angularly irregular large text), "B. Ounce." His comrades called him "Bounce."

"You see, March," continued Bounce, in a

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quiet way, thrusting his rugged countenance close to the embers occasionally, and blowing up the spark which he had kindled by means of flint, steel, and tinder — "you see, this is a cur'ous wurld; it takes a feelosopher to onderstand it c'rectly, and even he don't make much o't at the best. But I've always noticed that w'en the time for wakin' up's come, we've got to wake up whether we like it or no; d'ye see lad?"

"I'd see better if you didn't blow the ashes into my eyes in that way," answered March, laughing at the depth of his companion's philosophical remark. "But I say, old chap" (March had no occasion to call him "old chap," for Bounce was barely forty), "what if we don't fall in with a herd."

"Then we shall have to go home without meat, that's all," replied Bounce, filling and lighting his pipe.

"But I promised my mother a buffalo-hump in less than three days, and the first day and night are gone."

"You'd no right to promise your mother a hump," returned the plain-spoken and matter-of-fact hunter. "Nobody shud never go to promise what they can't perform. I've lived, off an' on, nigh forty years now, and I've obsarved them wot promises most always does least; so if you'll take the advice of an oldish hunter, you'll give it up, lad, at once."

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"Humph!" ejaculated March, "I suppose you began your *obsarvations* before you were a year old, — eh, Bounce?"

"I began 'em afore I was a day old. The first thing I did in this life was to utter an 'orrible roar, and I obsarved that immediately I got a drink; so I roared agin, an' got another. Leastwise I've bin told that I did, an' if it wasn't obsarvation as caused me for to roar w'en I wanted a drink, wot wos it."

Instead of replying, March started up, and shading his eyes with his right hand, gazed intently toward the horizon.

"Wot now, lad?" said Bounce rising quickly. "Ha! buffaloes!"

In half a minute the cords by which the two horses were fastened to pegs driven into the plain, were coiled up; in another half-minute the saddle-girths were buckled; in half a second more the men were mounted and tearing over the prairie like the wind.

"Ha, lad," remarked Bounce, with one of his quiet smiles — for he was a preëminently quiet man, — "but for them there prairie-hens we'd ha' slept this chance away."

The buffaloes, or, more correctly speaking, the bisons, which young Marston's sharp eye had discovered, were still so far distant that they appeared like crows or little black specks against the sky. In order to approach them as near as

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possible without attracting their attention, it was necessary that the two horsemen should make a wide circuit, so as to get well to leeward, lest the wind should carry the scent of them to the herd. Their horses being fleet, strong, and fresh, soon carried them to the proper direction, when they wheeled to the right, and galloped straight down upon their quarry, without any further attempt at concealment. The formation of the ground favored their approach, so that they were within a mile of the herd before being discovered.

At first the huge, hairy creatures gazed at the hunters in stupid surprise; then they turned and fled. They appeared, at the outset, to run slowly and with difficulty, and the plain seemed to thunder with their heavy tread; for there could not have been fewer than a thousand animals in the herd. But as the horsemen drew near they increased their speed and put the steeds, fleet and strong though they were, to their mettle.

On approaching the buffaloes the horsemen separated, each fixing his attention on a particularly fat young cow and pressing toward it. Bounce was successful in coming up with the one he had selected, and put a ball through its heart at the first shot. Not so Marston. Misfortune awaited him. Having come close up with the animal he meant to shoot, he cocked his rifle and held it in readiness across the pommel of his saddle, at the same time urging his horse

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nearer, in order to make a sure shot. When the horse had run up so close that its head was in line with the buffalo's flank, he pointed his rifle at its shoulder. At that precise moment the horse, whose attention was entirely engrossed with the buffalo, put his left fore-foot into a badger-hole. The consequence of such an accident is, usually, a tremendous flight through the air on the part of the rider, while his steed rolls upon the plain; but on the present occasion a still more surprising result followed. March Marston not only performed the aërial flight, but he alighted with considerable violence on the back of the affrighted buffalo. Falling on his face in a sprawling manner, he chanced to grasp the hairy mane of the creature with both hands, and, with a violent half-involuntary effort, succeeded in seating himself astride its back.

The whole thing was done so instantaneously that he had scarce time to realize what had happened to him ere he felt himself sweeping comfortably over the prairies on this novel and hitherto unridden steed! A spirit of wild, ungovernable glee instantly arose within him; seizing the handle of the heavy hunting-whip, which still hung from his right wrist by a leathern thong, he flourished it in the air, and brought it down on his charger's flank with a crack like a pistol-shot, causing the animal to wriggle its tail, toss its ponderous head, and kick

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up its heels in a way that well-nigh unseated him.

The moment Bounce beheld this curious apparition, he uttered a short laugh, or grunt, and, turning his horse abruptly, soon ranged up alongside.

"Hallo, March!" he exclaimed, "are you mad, boy?"

"Just about it," cried Marston, giving the buffalo another cut with the whip as he looked round with sparkling eyes and a broad grin at the hunter.

"Come, now, that won't do," said Bounce, gravely. "I'm 'sponsible to your mother for you. Git off now, or I'll poke ye over."

"Git off!" shouted the youth, "how can I?'

"Well, keep yer right leg a bit to one side, an' I'll stop yer horse for ye," said Bounce, coolly cocking his rifle.

"Hold hard, old fellow!" cried Marston in some alarm; "you'll smash my thigh-bone if you try. Stay, I'll do the thing myself."

Saying this, Marston drew his long hunting-knife, and plunged it into the buffalo's side.

"Lower down, lad — lower down. Ye can't reach the life there."

March bent forward, and plunged his knife into the animal's side again — up to the hilt; but it still kept on its headlong course, although the blood flowed in streams upon the plain. The

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remainder of the buffaloes had diverged right and left, leaving this singular group alone.

"Mind your eye," said Bounce, quickly," she's a-goin' to fall."

Unfortunately Marston had not time given him to mind either his eye or his neck. The wounded buffalo stumbled, and fell to the ground with a sudden and heavy plunge, sending its wild rider once again on an aërial journey, which terminated in his coming down on the plain so violently that he was rendered insensible.

On recovering consciousness, he found himself lying on his back, in what seemed to be a beautiful forest, through which a stream flowed with a gentle, silvery sound. The bank opposite rose considerably higher than the spot on which he lay, and he could observe, through his half-closed eye-lids, that its green slope was gemmed with beautiful flowers, and gilded with patches of sunlight that struggled through the branches overhead.

Young Marston's first impression was that he must be dreaming, and that he had got into one of the fairy-tale regions about which he had so often read to his mother. A shadow seemed to pass over his eyes as he thought this, and, looking up, he beheld the rugged face of Bounce gazing at him with an expression of considerable interest and anxiety.

"I say, Bounce, this is jolly!"

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"Is it?" replied the hunter with a "humph!" "If ye try to lift your head, I guess you'll change yer opinion."

Marston did try to raise his head, and did change his opinion. His neck felt as if it were a complication of iron hinges, which had become exceedingly rusty, and stood much in need of oil.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Marston, letting his head fall back on the saddle from which he had raised it.

"Ah, I thought so!" remarked Bounce.

"And is that all the sympathy you have got to give me, you old savage?" said the youth, testily.

"By no means," replied the other, patting his head; here's a drop o' water as 'll do ye good, lad, and after you've drunk it, I'll rub ye down."

"Thankee for the water," said Marston, with a deep sigh, as he lay back, after drinking with difficulty; "as to the rubbin' down, I'll ask for that when I want it. But tell me, Bounce, what has happened to me? — oh! I remember now, — the buffalo cow and that famous gallop. Ha! ha! ha! —— ho—o!"

Marston's laugh terminated in an abrupt groan as the rusty hinges again clamored for oil.

"You'll have to keep quiet, boy, for a few hours, and take a sleep if you can. I'll roast a bit o' meat and rub ye down with fat after you've eat as much of it as ye can. There's nothing like beef for a sick man's inside, an' fat for his outside

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— that's the feelosophy of the whole matter. You've a'most bin bu'sted wi' that there fall; but you'll be all right to-morrow. An' you've killed yer buffalo, lad, so yer mother 'll get the hump after all. Only keep yer mind easy, an' I guess human natur 'll do all the rest."

Having delivered himself of these sentiments in a quietly oracular manner, Bounce again patted March on the head, as if he had been a large baby or a favorite dog, and, rising up, proceeded to kindle a small fire, and to light his pipe.

Bounce smoked a tomahawk, which is a small iron hatchet used by most of the Indians of North America as a battle-axe. There is an iron pipe-bowl on the top of the weapon, and the handle, which is hollow, answers the purpose of a pipe-stem.

The hunter continued to smoke, and Marston continued to gaze at him till he fell asleep. When he awoke, Bounce was still smoking the tomahawk in the self-same attitude. The youth might have concluded that he had been asleep only a few minutes and that his friend had never moved; but he was of an observant nature, and noticed that there was a savory, well-cooked buffalo steak near the fire, and that a strong odor of marrow-bones tickled his nostrils — also, that the sun no longer rested on the green bank opposite. Hence, he concluded that he must have slept a considerable time, and that the tomahawk had been filled and emptied more than once.

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"Well, lad," said Bounce, looking round, "had a comf'able nap?"

"How did you know I was awake?" said March. "You weren't looking at me, and I didn't move."

"P'r'aps not, lad; but you winked."

"And, pray, how do you know that?"

"'Cause ye couldn't wink if ye was asleep, an' I heerd ye breathe diff'rent from afore, so I know'd ye wos awake; an' I knows that a man always winks w'en he comes awake, d'ye see! That's wot I calls the feelosophy of obsarvation."

"Very good," replied Marston, "and, that bein' the case, I should like much to try a little of the 'feelosophy' of supper."

"Right, lad, here you are; there's nothin' like it," rejoined Bounce, handing a pewter plate of juicy steak and marrow-bones to his young companion.

Marston attained a sitting posture with much difficulty and pain; but when he had eaten the steak and the marrow-bone he felt much better; and when he had swallowed a cup of hot tea (for they carried a small quantity of tea and sugar with them, by way of luxury), he felt immensely better; and when he finally lay down for the night he felt perfectly well,—always excepting a sensation of general batteredness about the back, and a feeling of rusty-hinges-wanting-oiliness in the region of the neck.

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"Now, Bounce," said he, as he lay down and pulled his blanket over his shoulder, "are the horses hobbled, and the rifles loaded, and my mother's hump out o' the way of wolves?"

"All right, lad."

"Then, Bounce, you go ahead, and tell me a story till I'm off asleep. Don't stop tellin' till I'm safe off. Pull my nose to make sure; and if I don't say 'hallo!' to that, I'm all right — in the land of Nod."

March Marston smiled as he said this, and Bounce grinned by way of reply.

"Wot'll I tell ye about, boy?"

"I don't mind what — Indians, grislies, buffaloes, trappers, — it's all one to me; only begin quick, and go ahead strong."

"Well, I ain't great at story tellin'! P'raps it would be more to the p'int if I was to tell ye about what I heered tell of on my last trip to the Mountains. Did I ever tell ye about the feller as the trappers that goes to the far North calls the 'Wild Man o' the West?'"

"No; what was he?" said Marston, yawning and closing his eyes.

"I dun know 'xactly wot he *was*. I'm not overly sure that I even know what he *is*, but I know what the trappers says of him; an' if only the half o't's true, he's a shiner, he is."

Having said thus much, Bounce filled his tomahawk, lighted it, puffed a large cloud from

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it, and looked through the smoke at his companion.

March, whose curiosity was aroused, partly by the novelty of the "Wild Man's" title, and partly by the lugubrious solemnity of Bounce, said,—

"Go on, old boy."

"Ha! it's easy to say, 'Go on;' but if you know'd the 'orrible things as is said about the Wild Man o' the Mountains, p'raps you'd say, 'Go off.' It 'll make yer blood froze."

"Never mind."

"An' yer hair git up on end."

"Don't care."

"An' yer two eyes start out o' yer head."

"All right."

Bounce, who was deeply superstitious, looked at his young friend with severe gravity for at least two minutes. Marston, who was not quite so superstitious, looked at his comrade for exactly the same length of time, and winked with one eye at the end of it.

"They says," resumed Bounce, in a deep tone, "the Wild Man o' the West *eats men!*"

"Don't he eat women?" inquired March, sleepily.

"Yes, an' childers too. An' wot's wuss, he eats 'em raw, an' they say he once swallered one—a little one — alive, without chewin' or chokin'!" ("Horrible!" murmured March.) "He's a dead

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shot, too; he carries a double-barrelled rifle twenty foot long that takes a small cannon-ball. I forgot to tell ye he's a giant — some o' the trappers calls him the 'giant o' the hills,' and they say he's 'bout thirty feet high — some says forty. But there's no gittin' at the truth in this here wurld."

Bounce paused here, but, as his companion made no observation, he went on in a half-soliloquizing fashion, looking earnestly all the time into the heart of the fire, as if he were addressing his remarks to a salamander.

"Ay, he's a crack shot, as I wos sayin'. One day he fell in with a grisly bear, an' the brute rushed at him; so he up rifle an' puts a ball up each nose" — ("I didn't know a grisly had two noses," murmured March), — "an' loaded agin', an' afore it comed up he put a ball in each eye; then he drew his knife an' split it right down the middle from nose to tail at one stroke, an' cut it across with another stroke; an', puttin' one quarter on his head, he took another quarter under each arm, an' the fourth quarter in his mouth, and so walked home to his cave in the mountains — 'bout one hundred and fifty miles off, where he roasted an' ate the whole bear at one sittin' — bones, hair, an' all!"

This flight was too strong for March. He burst into a fit of laughter, which called the rusty hinges into violent action and produced a groan.

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The laugh and the groan together banished drowsiness, so he turned on his back, and said, —

"Bounce, do you really believe all that?"

Thus pointedly questioned on what he felt to be a delicate point, Bounce drew a great number of whiffs from the tomahawk ere he ventured to reply. At length he said, —

"Well, to say truth, an' takin' a feelosophical view o' the p'int — I *don't*. But I b'lieve *some* of it. I do b'lieve there's some 'xtraord'nary critter in them there mountains — for I've lived nigh forty years — off and on — in these parts, an' I've always obsarved that in this wurld w'enever ye find *any thin'* ye've always got *somethin'*. Nobody never got hold o' somethin' an' found afterwards that it was nothin'. So I b'lieve there's somethin' in this wild man — how much I dun know."

Bounce followed up this remark with a minute account of the reputed deeds of this mysterious creature, all of which were more or less marvellous; and at length succeeded in interesting his young companion so deeply, as to fill him with a good deal of his own belief in at least a wild *something* that dwelt in the heart of the Rocky Mountains.

After a great deal of talk, and prolonged discussion, Bounce concluded with the assertion that "he'd give his best rifle, an' that was his only one, to see this wild man."

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To which Marston replied, —

"I'll tell you what it is, Bounce, I *will* see this wild man, if it's in the power of bones and muscles to carry me within eyeshot of him. Now, see if I don't."

Bounce nodded his head and looked sagacious, as he said, —

"D'ye know, lad, I don't mind if I go along with ye. It's true, I'm not tired of them parts hereabouts — and if I wos to live till I couldn't see, I don't think as ever I'd git tired o' the spot where my father larned me to shoot an' my mother dandled me on her knee; but I've got a fancy to see a little more o' the wurld, — 'specially the far off parts o' the Rocky Mountains, w'ere I've never bin yit; so I do b'lieve if ye wos to try an' persuade me very hard I'd consent to go along with ye."

"Will you, though?" cried March, eagerly (again, to his cost, forgetting the rusty hinges).

"Ay, that will I, boy," replied the hunter; "an' now I think on it, there's four as jolly trappers in Pine Point settlement at this here moment, as ever floored a grisly or fought an Injun. They're the real sort of metal. None o' yer tearin', swearin', murderin' chaps, as thinks the more they curse the bolder they are, an' the more Injuns they kill the cliverer they are; but steady quiet fellers, as don't speak much, but *does* a powerful quantity; boys that know a deer from

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a Blackfoot Injun, I guess; that goes to the mountains to trap and comes back to sell their skins, an' w'en they've sold 'em, goes right off agin, an' niver drinks."

"I know who you mean, I think; at least I know one of them," observed March.

"No ye don't, do ye? Who?"

"Waller, the Yankee."

"That's one," said Bounce, nodding; "Big Waller, we calls him."

"I'm not sure that I can guess the others, Surely Tim Slater isn't one?"

"No!" said Bounce, with an emphasis of tone and a peculiar twist of the point of his nose that went far to stamp the individual named with a character the reverse of noble. "Try agin."

"I can't guess."

"One's a French Canadian," said Bounce; "a little chap, with a red nose an' a pair o' coal-black eyes, but as bold as a lion."

"I know him," interrupted March; "Gibault Noir — Black Gibault, as they sometimes call him. Am I right?"

"Right, lad; that's two. Then there's Hawks-wing, the Injun whose wife and family were all murdered by a man of his own tribe, and who left his people after that an' tuck to trappin' with the whites; that's three. An' there's Redhand, the old trapper that's bin off and on between this place and the Rocky Mountains for nigh fifty years, I b'lieve."

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"Oh, I know him well. He must be made of iron, I think, to go through what he does at his time of life. I wonder what his right name is?"

"Nobody knows that, lad. You know, as well as I do, that he wos called Redhand by the Injuns in consekence o' the lot o' grislies he's killed in his day; but nobody never could git at his real name. P'rhaps it's not worth gittin' at. Now, them four 'll be startin' in a week or two for the mountains, an' wot's to hinder us a jinin' of them?"

To his own question Bounce, after a pause, replied with deliberate emphasis, "Nothin' whatsomedivir;" and his young companion heartily echoed the sentiment.

Exactly thirty-six hours after the satisfactory formation of the above resolution, March Marston galloped furiously toward the door of his mother's cottage, reined up, leaped to the ground, seized the buffalo hump that hung at his saddle-bow, and entered with a good deal of that impetuosity that had gone far to procure for him the title of madman. Flinging the bloody mass of meat on the floor he sat down on a chair, and said—

"There, mother."

"Well, you *are* a clever fellow," said Mrs. Marston, drying her hands (for she had been washing dishes), and giving her son a hearty kiss on the forehead.

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"Clever or not clever, mother, I'm off to the Rocky Mountains in two days."

Mrs. Marston was neither dismayed nor surprised. She was used to that sort of thing, and didn't mind it.

"What to do there, my boy?"

"To see the Wild Man o' the West."

"The what?"

"The Wild Man o' the West, mother."

It is needless to try our reader's patience with the long conversation that followed. March had resolved to preach a discourse with the "Wild Man o' the West" for his text, and he preached so eloquently that his mother (who was by no means a timid woman) at length not only agreed to let him go, but commended him for his resolution. The only restraint she laid upon her son had reference to his behavior toward the Wild Man, if he should happen to meet with him.

"You may look at him March, (Mrs. Marston, spoke of him as if he were a caged wild beast!), and you may speak to him, but you *must not* fight with him, except in self-defence. If he lets *you* alone, you must let *him* alone. Promise me that, boy."

"I promise, mother."

Not long after this promise was made, a light bark-canoe was launched upon the river, and into it stepped our hero, with his friend Bounce, and

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Big Waller, Black Gibault, Hawkswing, and Redhand, the trappers. A cheer rang from the end of the little wharf at Pine Point, as the frail craft shot out into the stream. The wild woods echoed back the cheer, which mingled with the lusty answering shout of the trappers as they waved their caps to the friends they left behind them. Then, dipping their paddles with strong rapid strokes, they headed the canoe toward the Rocky Mountains, and soon disappeared up one of those numerous tributary streams that constitute the head-waters of the Missouri river.

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CHAPTER III.

The Beauties of the Wilderness. — Portages. — Philosophy of Settling Down. — An Enormous Footprint. — Supper procured, and a Bear-hunt in prospect.

AFTER paddling, and hauling, and lifting, and tearing, and wading, and toiling, and struggling, for three weeks, our hero and his friends found themselves deep in the heart of the unknown wilderness — unknown, at least, to the civilized world, though not altogether unknown to the trappers and the Red Indians of the Far West.

There is something inexpressibly romantic and captivating in the idea of traversing those wild regions of this beautiful world of ours which have never been visited by human beings, with the exception of the few wandering savages who dwell therein.

So thought and felt young Marston, one splendid afternoon, as he toiled up to the summit of a grassy mound with a heavy pack on his shoulders. Throwing down the pack, he seated himself upon it, wiped his heated brow with the sleeve of his hunting-shirt, and gazed with delight upon the noble landscape that lay spread out before him.

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"Ha! *that's* the sort o' thing — that's it!" — he exclaimed, nodding his head, as if the rich and picturesque arrangement of wood and water had been got up expressly for his benefit, and he were pleased to signify his entire approval of it.

"That's just it," he continued, after a short contemplative pause, "just what I expected to find. Ain't I glad? eh!"

March certainly looked as if he was; but, being at that moment alone, no one replied to his question or shared his enjoyment. After another short pause he resumed his audible meditations.

"Now, did ever any one see sich a place as this in all the wide 'arth? That's what I want to know. Never! Just look at it now. There's miles an' miles o' woods an' plains, an' lakes, an' rivers, wherever I choose to look — all round me. And there are deer, too, lots of 'em, lookin' quite tame, and no wonder, for I suppose the fut of man never rested here before, except, may-be, the fut of a redskin now an' again. And there's poplars, an' oaks, an' willows, as thick as they can grow."

March might have added that there were also elm, and sycamore, and ash, and hickory, and walnut, and cotton-wood trees in abundance, with numerous aspen groves, in the midst of which were lakelets margined with reeds and hare-bells, and red willows, and wild roses, and

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choke-berries, and prickly pears, and red and white currants. He might, we say, have added all this, and a great deal more, with perfect truth; but he didn't, for his knowledge of the names of such things was limited, so he confined himself, like a wise youth, to the enumeration of those things that he happened to be acquainted with.

"And," continued March, starting up and addressing his remark to a hollow in the ground a few yards off, "there's grisly bars here, too, for there's the fut-mark of one, as sure as I'm a white man!"

Most people would have been inclined to differ with March in regard to his being a white man, for he was as brown as constant exposure in hot weather could make him; but he referred to his blood rather than to his skin, which was that of white parents.

The footprint which he had discovered was, indeed, that of a grisly bear, and he examined it with more than usual interest, for, although many of those ferocious denizens of the western woods had been already seen, and a few shot by the trappers on their voyage to this point, none had been seen so large as the monster whose footprint now attracted Marston's attention. The print was eleven inches long, exclusive of the claws, and seven inches broad.

While March was busily engaged in examin-

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ing it, Black Gibault came panting up the hill with a huge pack on his back.

"Ho! March, me garçon, v'at you be find là?" cried the Canadian, throwing down his pack, and advancing.

"A bar, Gibault; Caleb himself. A regular big un, too. Just look here."

"Ah! oui, vraiment; dat am be one extonishin' vopper, sure 'nuff. Mais, him's gone pass long ago, so you better come avay an' finish de portage."

"Not I, lad," cried March, gaily, as he flung himself upon the grassy mound; "I'm goin' to admire this splendid country till I'm tired of it, and leave you and the other fellows to do the work."

"Oh! ver' goot," replied Gibault, sitting down beside our hero, and proceeding to fill his pipe, "I will 'mire de contray, too, Ha! it be unmarkibly beautiful — specially when beholded troo one cloud of tabacco smoke."

"Alas! Gibault, we'll have to move off sooner than we expected, for there it comes."

The two friends leaped up simultaneously, and, seizing their packs, hurried down the mound, entered the thick bushes, and vanished.

The object whose sudden appearance had occasioned this abrupt departure would, in truth, have been somewhat singular, not to say alarming, in aspect, to those who did not know its nature. At

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a distance, it looked like one of those horrible antediluvian monsters one reads of, with a lank body, about thirty feet long. It was reddish yellow in color, and came on at a slow crawling pace, its back appearing occasionally above the underwood. Presently its outline became more defined, and it turned out to be a canoe instead of an antediluvian monster, with Big Waller and Bounce acting the part of legs to it. Old Redhand, the trapper, and Hawkswing, the Indian, walked alongside, ready to relieve their comrades when they should grow tired, — for a large canoe is a heavy load for two men, — or to assist them in unusually bad places, or to support them and prevent accidents, should they chance to stumble.

"Have a care now, lad, at the last step," said Redhand, who walked a little in advance.

"Yer help would be better than yer advice, old feller," replied Bounce, as he stepped upon the ridge or mound which Marston and his companion had just quitted. "Lend a hand; we'll take a spell here. I do believe my shoulder's out o' joint. There, gently, — that's it."

"Wall, I guess this *is* Eden," cried Big Waller, gazing around him with unfeigned delight. "Leastwise, if it ain't, it must be the very nixt location to them there diggins of old father Adam. Ain't it splendifferous?"

Big Waller was an out-and-out Yankee trap-

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per. It is a mistake to suppose that all Yankees "guess," and "calculate" and talk through their noses. There are many who don't, as well as many who do; but certain it is that Big Waller possessed all these peculiarities in an alarming degree. Moreover, he was characteristically thin, and tall, and sallow. Nevertheless, he was a hearty, good-natured fellow, not given to boasting so much as most of his class, but much more given to the performance of daring deeds. In addition to his other qualities, the stout Yankee had a loud, thundering, melodious voice, which he was fond of using, and tremendous activity of body, which he was fond of exhibiting.

He was quite a contrast, in all respects to his Indian companion, Hawkswing, who, although about as tall, was not nearly so massive or powerful. Like most North American Indians, he was grave and taciturn in disposition; in other respects, there was nothing striking about him. He was clad, like his comrades, in a trapper's hunting shirt and leggings; but he scorned to use a cap of any kind, conceiving that his thick, straight black hair was a sufficient covering, as, undoubtedly it was. He was as courageous as most men; a fair average shot, and, when occasion required, as lithe and agile as a panther; but he was not a hero; few savages are. He possessed one good quality, however, beyond his kinsmen; he preferred mercy to revenge, and did

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not gloat over the idea of tearing the scalps off his enemies, and fringing his coat and leggings therewith.

"'Tis a sweet spot," said Redhand to his comrades, who stood or reclined in various attitudes around him. "Such a place as I've often thought of casting anchor in for life."

"An' why don't ye, then?" inquired Waller. "If I was thinkin' o' locating down any whar', I guess I'd jine ye, old man. But I'm too fond o' rovin' for that yet. I calc'late it'll be some years afore I come to that pint. Why don't ye build a log-hut, and enjoy yerself?"

"'Cause I've not just come to that point either," replied the old man, with a smile.

Redhand had passed his best days many years before. His form was spare, and his silvery locks were thin; but his figure was still tall and straight as a poplar, and the fire of youth still lingered in his dark blue eye. The most striking and attractive point about Redhand was the extreme kindliness that beamed in his countenance. A long life in the wilderness had wrinkled it; but every wrinkle tended, somehow, to bring out the great characteristic of the man. Even his frown had something kindly in it. The prevailing aspect was that of calm serenity. Redhand spoke little, but he was an attentive listener, and, although he never laughed loudly, he laughed often and heartily, in his own way, at the sallies of his

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younger comrades. In youth, he must have been a strikingly handsome man. Even in old age he was a strong one.

"I'll tell ye what's my opinion now, boys, in regard to settlin' down," said Bounce, who, having filled and lighted his pipe, now found himself in a position to state his views comfortably. "Ye see, settlin' down may, in a gin'ral way, be said to be nonsense. In pint o' fact, there ain't no sich a thing as settlin' down. When a feller sits down, why, in a short bit, he's bound to rise up agin, and when he goes to bed, he means for to git up next mornin'." (Here Bounce paused, drew several whiffs, and rammed down the tobacco in his pipe with the end of his little finger.) "Then, when a feller locates in a place, he's sure for to be movin' about, more or less, as long as he's got a leg to stand on. Now, what I say is, that when a man comes to talk o' settlin' down, he's losin' heart for a wanderin' life among all the beautiful things o' creation, an' when a man loses heart for the beautiful things o' creation, he'll soon settle down for good and all. He's in a bad way, he is, and oughtn't to encourage hisself in sich feelin's. I b'lieve that to be the feelosophy o' the whole affair, and I don't b'lieve that nobody o' common edication — I don't mean school edication, but backwoods edication — would go for to think otherwise. Wot say you, Waller?"

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"Sartinly not," replied the individual thus appealed to.

Big Waller had a deep reverence for the supposed wisdom of his friend Bounce. He listened to his lucubrations with earnest attention at all times, and, when he understood them, usually assented to all his friend said. When Bounce became too profound for him, as was not unfrequently the case, he contented himself with nodding his head, as though to say, "I'm with you in heart, lad, though not quite clear in my mind; but its all right, *I'm* quite sartin."

"Well, then," resumed Bounce, turning to Redhand, "what do *you* think o' them sentiments, old man?"

Redhand, who had been paying no attention whatever to these sentiments, but, during the delivery of them, had been gazing wistfully out upon the wide expanse of country before him, laid his hand on Bounce's shoulder, and said, in a low earnest tone —

"It's a grand country! D'ye see the little clear spot yonder, on the river bank, with the aspen grove behind it, an' the run of prairie on the right, an' the little lake not a gun-shot off on the left? That's the spot I've sometimes thought of locatin' on when my gun begins to feel too heavy. There'll be cities there some day. Bricks, and mortar, and stone, 'll change it's face — an' corn-fields, an' ——, but not in our day, lad, not

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in our day. The redskins and the bears 'll hold it as long as we're above ground. Yes, I'd like to settle down there."

"Come, come, Redhand," said Bounce, "this sort o' thing 'll never do. Why, you're as hale and hearty as the best on us. Wot on 'arth makes you talk of settlin' down in that there fashion?"

"Ha!" exclaimed Waller, energetically, "I guess if ye goes on in that style ye'll turn into a riglar hiplecondrik — ain't that the word, Bounce? I heer'd the minister say it was the wust kind o' the blues. What's *your* opinion o' settling down, Hawkswing?"

To this question the Indian gravely replied, in his own language (with which the trappers were well acquainted), that, not having the remotest idea of what they were talking about, he entertained no opinion in regard to it whatever.

"Well, wotiver others may hold," remarked Bounce, emphatically, "I'm strong agin' settlin' down nowhar'."

"So am I, out an' out," said Waller.

"Dat be plain to the naked eye," observed Gibault, coming up at the moment. "Surement you have settle down here for ever. Do you s'pose, mes garçons, dat de canoe will carry *hisself* over de portage? Voilà! vat is dat?"

Gibault pointed to the foot-print of the grisly bear, as he spoke.

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"It's a bar," remarked Bounce, quietly.

"Caleb," added Waller, giving the name frequently applied to the grisly bear by western hunters. "I calc'late it's nothin' new to see Caleb's feet in the mud."

"Mais, it be new to see hims fut so big, you oogly Yankee," cried Gibault, putting Waller's cap over his eyes, and running into the bush to avoid the consequences.

At that moment a deer emerged from the bushes, about fifty yards from the spot on which the trappers rested, and, plunging into the river, made for the opposite bank.

"There's our supper," said Bounce, quietly lifting his rifle in a leisurely way, and taking aim without rising from the spot on which he sat or removing the pipe from his lips.

The sharp crack was followed by a convulsive heave on the part of the deer, which fell over on its side and floated down stream.

Big Waller gave utterance to a roar of satisfaction, and, flinging his pipe from him, bounded down the bank towards a point of rock, where he knew, from the set of the current, the deer would be certain to be stranded. Gibault, forgetting his recent piece of impertinence, darted toward the same place, and both men reached it at the same instant. Big Waller immediately lifted his little friend in his huge arms, and tossed him into the centre of a thick soft bush, out of which he scram-

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bled in time to see his comrade catch the deer by the horns, as it floated past, and drag it on shore.

"Hah! I vill pay you off von time," cried Gibault, laughing, and shaking his fist at Waller. Then, seizing the last bale of goods that had not been carried across the portage, he ran away with it nimbly up the banks of the stream.

Big Waller placed the deer on his shoulders with some difficulty, and followed in the same direction.

On reaching the other end of the portage, they found the canoe reloaded and in the water, and their comrades evincing symptoms of impatience.

"Come on, lads, come on," cried March, who seemed to be the most impatient of them all. "We've seen Caleb! He's up the river, on this side. Get in! He's sich a banger, oh!"

Before the sentence was well finished, all the men were in their places except Black Gibault, who remained on the bank to shove off the canoe.

"Now lad, get in," said Redhand, whose usually quiet eye appeared to gleam at the near prospect of a combat with the fierce and much-dreaded monster of the Far West.

"All right, mes garçons," replied Gibault; "hand me mine gun; I vill valk on the bank, an' see vich vay hims go, — so, adieu!"

With a powerful push, he sent the light craft into the stream, and, turning on his heel, entered the woods.

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The others at once commenced paddling up the river with energetic strokes.

"He's a wild fellar that," remarked Bounce, after they had proceeded some distance and reached a part of the stream where the current was less powerful. "I'd bet my rifle he's git the first shot at Caleb; I only hope he'll not fall in with him till we git ashore, else it may go hard with him."

"So it may," said Waller; "if it goes as hard wi' Gibault as it did wi' my old comrade, Bob Swan, it'll be no fun, I guess."

"What happened to him?" asked March, who was ever open-eared for stories.

"Oh, it was nothing very curious, but I guess it was 'onconvanient,' as them coons from Ireland says. Bob Swan went—he did—away right off alone, all by hisself, to shoot a grisly with a old musket as wasn't fit to fire powder, not to speak o' ball. He was sich a desprit feller, Bob Swan was, that he cut after it without takin' time to see wot wos in the gun. I follered him as fast as I could, hollerin' for him to stop and see if he wos loaded; but I calc'late he wos past stoppin'. Wall, he comes up wi' the bar suddently, and the bar looks at him, and he looks at it. Then he runs up, claps the gun to his shoulder, and pulls the trigger; but it wos a rusty old lock, an' no fire came. There wos fire come from the bar's eyes, though, I *do* guess! It ran at him, an' he

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ran away. Of course Caleb soon came up, an' Bob primed as he ran an' wheeled about, stuck the muzzle of the old musket right into Caleb's mouth, and fired. He swallered the whole charge, that bar did, as if it had been a glass o' grog, and didn't he cough some? Oh, no! an' he roared, too, jist like this ——."

Big Waller, in the excitement of his narrative, was about to give a vocal illustration, when Bounce suddenly extinguished him by clapping his hand on his mouth.

"Hist! you wild buffalo," he said, "you'll frighten off all the bars within ten miles of us, if you raise your horrable trumpet!"

"I do believe, I forgot," said the Yankee, with a low chuckle, when his mouth was released.

"Well, but what happened to Bob Swan?" inquired March, eagerly.

"Wot happened! I guess the bar cotched him by the leg, an' smashed it in three places, before you could wink, but, by good luck, I come up at that moment, an' put a ball right through Caleb's brains. Bob got better, but he never got the right use o' his leg after that. An' we found that he'd fired a charge o' small shot down that bar's throat — he had!"

"Hallo! look! is yon Caleb?" inquired March, in a hoarse whisper, as he pointed with his paddle to a distant point up the river where a dark object was seen moving on the bank.

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"That's him," said Bounce. "Now then, do yer best, an' we'll land on the point just below him."

"That's sooner said than done," remarked Redhand, quietly, "for there's another portage between us and Caleb."

As the old man spoke, the canoe passed round a low point which had hitherto shut out the view of the bed of the river from the travellers, and the vision of a white, though not high, waterfall, burst upon their sight, at the same moment that the gushing sound of water broke upon their ears. At any other time the beauty of the scene would have drawn forth warm, though, perhaps, quaint and pithy remarks of admiration. Wood and water were seen picturesquely mingled and diversified in endless variety. Little islands studded the surface of the river, which was so broad and calm at that place as to wear the appearance of a small lake. At the upper end of this lake it narrowed abruptly, and here occurred the fall, which glittered in the sun's bright rays like a cascade of molten silver. The divers trees and shrubs, both on the islets and on the mainland, presented, in some places, the rich cultivated appearance of the plantations on a well-tended domain; but in other places, the fallen timber, the rank tangled vegetation, and the beautiful wild flowers, showed that man's hand had not yet destroyed the wild beauty of the virgin wilderness. The sky above

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was bright and blue, with a few thin feathery clouds resting motionless upon its vast concave, and the air was so still that even the tremulous aspen leaves were but slightly agitated, while the rest of the forest's drapery hung perfectly motionless.

Complete silence would have reigned but for the mellow sound of the distant fall and the sweet plaintive cries of innumerable wild fowl that flew hither and thither, or revelled in the security of their sedgy homes. Flocks of wild geese passed in constant succession overhead, in the form of acute angles, giving a few trumpet notes now and then, as if to advertise their passage to the far north to the dwellers in the world below. Bustling teal rose in groups of dozens or half-dozens as the red canoe broke upon their astonished gaze, and sent them, with whistling wings, up or down the river. A solitary northern diver put up his long neck here and there to gaze for an instant inquisitively, and then sank, as if forever, into the calm water, to reappear long after in some totally new and unexpected quarter. A napping duck or two, being wellnigh run over by the canoe, took wing with a tremendous splutter and a perfectly idiotical compound of a quack and a roar, while numerous flocks of plover, which had evidently meant to lie still among the sedges and hide while the canoe passed, sprang into the air at the unwonted hullabaloo, and made off, with diverse

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shriek and whistle, as fast as their wings could carry them. Besides these noisy denizens of the wilderness, there were seen, in various places, cranes, and crows, and magpies, and black terns, and turkey-buzzards, all of which were more or less garrulous in expressing surprise at the unexpected appearance of the trappers in their wild domain. And, just as the canoe drew near to the place at the foot of the fall, where they meant to land and make the portage, a little cabri, or prong-horned antelope, leaped out of the woods, intending, doubtless, to drink, caught sight of the intruders, gave one short glance of unutterable amazement, and then rebounded into the bush like an electrified india-rubber ball.

"Now, then," said Bounce, as he leaped ashore, and held the canoe steady while his comrades landed, "jist be cool, an' no hurry; make the portage, launch the canoe atop o' the fall, sot off agin, an' then — hurrah for that there grisly bar!"

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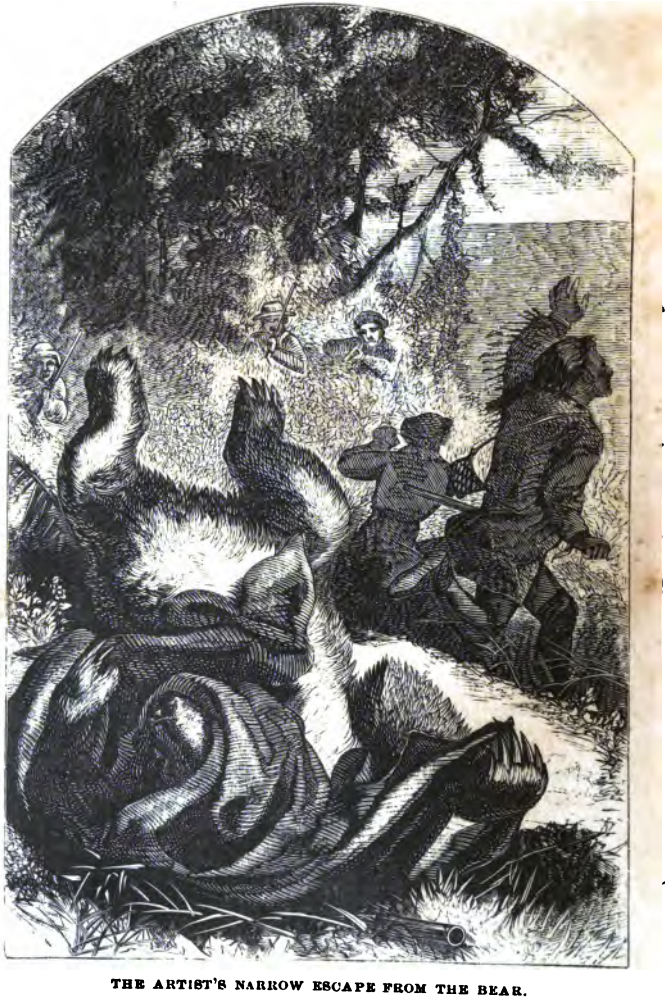

THE ARTIST'S NARROW ESCAPE FROM THE BEAR.

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CHAPTER IV.

Gibault has an Adventure, and discovers a very strange Creature in the Woods. — A most tremendous Bear-hunt particularly described.

MEANWHILE, Black Gibault, having followed the course of the river for some distance on foot, struck into the woods, sought for and found the track of the bear, and, looking carefully to the priming of his gun, and knocking the edge of the flint to sharpen it, pushed forward in pursuit with the ardor of a reckless man.

Gibault Noir was a goose! But he was an amiable goose; therefore men forgave his follies. Had Gibault not been a goose he never would have set off alone in pursuit of a grisly bear when he had comrades who might have accompanied him. Every one knows — at least, if every one does not know, every one who reads these pages may know henceforth — that the grisly bear of the western prairies and Rocky Mountains is one of the most desperate monsters and most dreaded animals on the face of the earth; not dreaded merely by the weak and timorous, but dreaded also by the bravest Indians and the boldest trappers. Of course we do not mean to say that by these latter the grisly

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bear is dreaded with any thing like cowardly terror; but it is regarded with that degree of wholesome anxiety and extreme caution with which men usually regard an excessively dangerous and powerful enemy.

Unlike other bears, the grisly bear scorns to fly from before the face of man. His ferocity, when wounded, is terrible, and his tenacity of life is such, that, however many mortal wounds one may give him, he will retain life and strength long enough to kill his assailant before he himself dies, unless he is shot dead at once by a ball being planted in his heart or brain, both of which are difficult to reach.

He has a grumpy sort of magnanimity of his own, however, and will usually let men alone if men will let him alone. But men are not prone to let any thing alone: hence encounters are frequent; wounds, on both sides, are numerous; and death, on one or other side, is almost certain.

Old trappers are not fond of attacking Caleb single-handed, but young hot-blooded fellows, who have got their names to make, are less cautious, and sometimes even court the combat, as was the case in the present instance with reckless Gibault Noir.

For half an hour, Gibault went over the ground at a sort of half-walk, half-trot, stopping occasionally to examine the prints of the bear more narrowly when they passed across hard

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ground that did not take a good impression. At length he came to a deep gully or creek where the bushes were so dense that he could not see far through them in any direction. Here he halted, reëxamined his priming, and, peering cautiously through the underwood, advanced with much greater deliberation and care than heretofore.

In descending the gully, Gibault stumbled once or twice, and made one or two crashing bursts through bushes that would have proved quite impervious to most men. After much toil, he reached the bottom, and, standing there, up to the ankles in a small rivulet, gazed upward at the bank he had now to ascend.

"Vraiment, it be uncommonly difficile," said he, addressing himself to the task, while the perspiration began to roll down his forehead.

At last he reached the top of the bank on the other side, and, after panting for some time, began to look for the bear's footprints; but these could not now be found. In his scramble through the gully he had lost them, and the ground on the side he had just reached was so hard and rocky that it seemed to him doubtful whether it was capable of receiving any visible impression from a bear's paw. It was just possible, too, that the animal had found the descent of the gully as difficult as he himself had; in

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which case it was highly probable that it had used the course of the rivulet as a pathway.

For a moment, the little Canadian meditated a second descent into the gully for the purpose of settling this point, but, having not yet quite ceased to pant from his recent exertions, he thought better of it, and determined to make a further examination of the ground where he was. After doing so for a quarter of an hour, his exertions were rewarded by the discovery of what appeared to be a track. It was not very distinct, but it was sufficiently so to induce him to follow it up with renewed ardor.

Presently he came upon a spot where the ground was not so thickly covered with underwood, and where, in some places, it was so soft as to show an exact print of the foot of the animal he was following up. Here he received a great disappointment, and an equally great surprise! — a disappointment on finding that the track he followed was *not* that of a bear, and a surprise on discovering that it *was* that of a man.

On first making this discovery, Gibault stopped short, laid his gun on the ground, stooped down, planted a hand on each knee, opened his eyes to their utmost, pursed his lips to the tightest, and stared at the footprint, the very embodiment of astonishment. After a few seconds he gave vent to a low whistle, and said "Ho!" Exactly ten seconds after that, he said "Ha!" and, raising

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his right hand, scratched the point of his nose, which, being too red naturally, was not improved by the operation.

None of these acts and exclamations, either collectively or singly, seemed to afford him any enlightenment, for he began to shake his head slowly from side to side, as if he had come to the conclusion that the whole affair was utterly beyond his limited comprehension; then he started up, shouldered his gun, and followed the track of the man with as much ardor as he had formerly pursued that of the bear.

Perseverance is almost invariably rewarded. This would seem to be one of those laws of nature which fail to operate only on very rare and peculiar occasions. Gibault had not advanced more than a hundred yards when he came suddenly upon the man whose feet had made the tracks he had been following.

"The Vild-Man-ov-de-Vest! certainement!" muttered Black Gibault, slowly, as he gazed at the creature before him, and quietly cocked his rifle to be ready for any emergency.

Certainly the man upon whom our trapper had stumbled thus suddenly might have been styled the wild man of any region — west, north, east, or south, — with perfect propriety. On his legs were a pair of dark gray fustian trousers, which had seen so much service that, from the knee downwards, they were torn into shreds. His feet were

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covered by a pair of moccasins. Instead of the usual hunting-shirt he wore one of the yellow deer-skin coats of a Blackfoot chief, which was richly embroidered with beads and quilt-work, and fringed with scalp-locks. On his head he wore a felt hat, with a broad brim and a tall conical crown, somewhat resembling a Spanish sombrero, and beside him, on the bough of a tree, hung a long blue Spanish cloak. The countenance of this extraordinary man was handsome and youthful, but wild and somewhat haggard, as if from much recent suffering. His eye was black and piercing, his nose aquiline, and his forehead broad, but his mouth was effeminate, his chin small and beardless, his neck long, his shoulders narrow and sloping, and his black hair hung in long straight locks over his shoulders. A short sword, somewhat resembling that of the ancient Roman, lay on the sward beside him, and near to it a huge cavalry pistol of the olden time, with a brass barrel and a bell mouth — a species of miniature blunderbuss. Its fellow was stuck in his belt, beneath the chief's coat, as could be observed from the appearance of the butt protruding from the opening in the breast thereof.

This personage was seated on a grassy knoll so absorbed in some curious kind of occupation that he was totally unobservant of the presence of Gibault until he had approached to within thirty yards of him. Although his occupation

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was a mystery to the trapper, to one a little more conversant with the usages of civilized life, the open book on the knee, the easy flow of the pencil, and the occasional use of a piece of india-rubber, would have been sufficient evidence that the young man was sketching the view before him.

"Ahem!" coughed Gibault.

The stranger scattered book, pencil, and india-rubber to the winds (or to the atmosphere, for there happened to be no wind at the time), and started up. In doing so, he showed that he was at least a tall, if not a stout fellow. Seizing a pistol with one hand and his sword with the other, he presented both at Gibault, and yelled, rather than shouted, "Stay! halt! stop now, my man: drop the butt of your gun, else I'll — I'll blow out your brains."

Although somewhat startled by this unusual mode of salutation, the trapper had sense and quickness enough to perceive that the artist was in any thing but a warlike state of mind, and that his violent demonstration was the result of having been startled; so, pulling off his cap with that native politeness which is one of the characteristics of the French Canadian, he advanced, and said, —

"Bon jour, monsieur. I ver' moch sorray dat I be give you von fright. Pardon, sair; how you do?"

"Thank you, — thank you, good fellow," — re-

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plied the artist, laying down his weapons, and grasping Gibault's proffered hand with a sigh of evident relief, "I am well, excellently well. You did, indeed, startle me by your sudden appearance; but no harm is done, and where none was intended no apology is necessary. You are a Frenchman, I think?"

"Non, sair; not 'xactly. I be French Canadian. Mine fadder was be von Canadian; mine moder was a Frenchvoman; I be leetle of both."

"And you have cause to be proud of your country, my man," returned the artist, collecting his scattered drawing materials and quietly sitting down to continue his sketch, "a splendid country, and a noble people. Sit down, my good friend, if you can spare time, while I put a few finishing touches to this sketch."

"Mais," said Gibault, rubbing his nose in great perplexity at the coolness of this eccentric wanderer; "Mais, monsieur, I hab *not* time; I be follerin' de tracks of von monstracious grisly bar ——"

"What! a grisly bear?" cried the artist, looking up with sudden animation.

"Oui, monsieur. We have see him not long 'go, an' hopes to kill him soon."

The artist's dark eye sparkled with animation as he hastily shut up his sketch-book and thrust it, with his drawing materials, into a small pocket inside the breast of his coat.

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"A grisly bear!" he repeated. "Ha! lead on, good fellow, I will follow."

Thus urged, Gibault, without further loss of time, led the way to the banks of the river, followed closely by his new friend, who stalked behind him with long ostrich-like strides. The semi-theatrical air of the artist made a deep impression on the trapper. Had Gibault known what a theatrical air was, he might have been immensely tickled; but, being what he was,—an unsophisticated son of the wilderness,—he knew nothing about such airs, and therefore regarded his companion in the light of a superior order of being, or a madman; he was not quite sure which.

In a few minutes, they emerged from the bushes and came out upon the bank of the river, which, at that part, was high and precipitous, with few trees, but a considerable quantity of underwood on the slopes.

"Are you sure, friend, that a bear has been seen by you?" inquired the artist.

"Oui; most positavly sure, sair. Ha! an' here be him's fut encore. I have lose him in de vood. Now, monsieur, have your pistol ready."

"Lead on," returned the artist. "I have longed much for this day. To shoot an individual of this ferocious class has been my ambition ——. Ho! friend, look here. Yonder object seems like a canoe. Whence comes it.

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think you? This region, I know, is not very safe. There are Indians who do not love the whites in ——."

"No fear, monsieur," interrupted Gibault, "Dat be mine comerades — good mans an' true every von. Dey come to land here, I see."

A low growl in the bushes, a little distance ahead of them, put an abrupt termination to the conversation. Gibault threw forward the muzzle of his gun, and glanced at his comrade. The glance did not tend to comfort him. The artist was pale as death. This, and an occasional twitch of the lip, were clear and unmistakable signs to the backwoodsman that fear had taken possession of his friend, and that he was not to be counted on in the moment of danger. Yet there was a stern knitting of the eyebrows, and a firm pressure of the lips, that seemed to indicate better qualities, and perplexed him not a little.

"P'rhaps, monsieur," suggested Gibault, hesitatingly, "you had better 'vait for de canoe."

"Lead on!" said the artist, cocking both pistols and pointing with one of them to the place whence the growl had issued.

Gibault elevated his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders characteristically, and, uttering the single word "bien!" walked quickly forward.

A few steps brought him to an open space, in the midst of which the grisly bear was discovered. It was seated on its haunches, looking sulkily

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about, as if it had a suspicion that enemies were tracking it. Creeping with the utmost caution on his hands and knees, Gibault got to within forty yards of the monster, whose aspect at that moment was enough to try the courage of most men. There was a wicked glare in his little eye, as he swayed his huge body from side to side, that indicated but too clearly the savage nature of his disposition. Even Gibault felt a little uneasy, and began to think himself a fool for having ventured on such an expedition alone. His state of mind was not improved by the sound of the artist's teeth chattering in his head like castanets.

Taking a very long and deliberate aim at the bear's heart, he pulled the trigger, but the faithless lock of his old flint-gun missed fire. Without a sign of annoyance or agitation, the trapper recocked the gun, again pulled the trigger, and with the same result. Three times this occurred, and at each click of the lock the bear cocked his ears inquiringly. The third time, he rose and sauntered slowly towards the spot where the men lay concealed.

"Stay," whispered the artist, as Gibault was once more about to try his piece, after rubbing the edge of his flint with his thumb-nail,—"stay, I will fire."

So saying, he suddenly pointed a pistol straight at the advancing monster and fired. A tremen-

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dous roar followed the report. Gibault leaped up, exclaiming angrily, "Vat foolishness! a pistol! hah! ve must run." He turned at once to do so.

"Stay!" cried the artist, who no longer trembled, though his countenance was still ashy pale, "I have another pistol."

"Does you vish to *die?*" yelled the trapper, seizing his comrade by the collar.

Whether it was the yell of the man, or the reiterated roar of the advancing bear, or both combined, that had an effect on the artist, we cannot tell, but certain it is that he sprang up and darted after Gibault with astonishing rapidity. Being long-legged and uncommonly supple he soon passed him; but, fast though they both ran, the bear ran faster, and, having been badly cut up about the face by the slugs with which the pistol had been charged, his spirit was roused to the utmost pitch of ferocity.

Now, while this was going on in the bush, the other trappers were quietly fastening the line of their canoe to a shrub that held it floating in a pool of still water near the shore. No sooner did the pistol shot ring upon their ears than every man seized his gun, hastily examined the priming, and scrambled up the bank, which, at that spot, was very steep.

Having gained the top, they paused for one instant to gaze intently at the bank of the river

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above them, in order to ascertain the exact spot to which they ought to hurry.

"I see no smoke," said March Marston, in a tone of deep anxiety.

"Gibault's gun did'nt use for to bark in that sort o' voice," observed Bounce.

"I do b'lieve that bar's got 'im," cried Big Waller, bounding forward.

He had not taken a second bound when the artist, flying at full speed about three hundred yards up the river, burst upon the astonished vision of the party. His sombrero had blown off, his long hair streamed straight behind him, so did the scalp locks on his coat, and so did his long cloak which was fastened to his neck by a clasp, and which, in his present panting and rushing condition, wellnigh strangled him.

Before the wonder-stricken trappers had time to remark on this singular apparition, or to form any opinion in regard to it, poor Gibault came tearing round the point like a maniac, with the bear close upon his heels. This was enough. The backwoodsmen no longer showed any signs of surprise or hesitancy. A grisly bear was a familiar object — a comrade in imminent danger was equally so. They sprang forward to meet the fugitives.

By this time the cloak had so retarded and strangled the poor artist, that he had fallen a pace or two behind Gibault, and it seemed almost

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certain that he would fall a victim to the furious bear before the trappers could kill it, for they could not venture to fire at it while the fugitives almost screened it from their view. As they drew near to each other the trappers almost instinctively divided into two parties. Redland and Hawkswing went a little to the right; Bounce, Waller, and our hero diverged to the left, so as to let the flying men pass between them, and thus attack the bear on both sides at once.

Gibault attempted to cheer as he darted through the friendly line, but he could only give forth a gasp. At that moment an unexpected incident contributed to the deliverance of the artist. The bear was within a yard of him as he came up; just then the clasp of his cloak gave way, and the huge garment instantly enveloped the head of the bear and a considerable portion of its body. It tripped, rolled over, and, in attempting to free itself, tore the cloak to shreds.

At the same instant a volley was fired by the trappers, and three balls pierced its body. None of them, however, seemed to have hit a mortal part, for the infuriated animal instantly rose and glared from side to side in disappointed malice, while the trappers who had fired were reloading, each behind a bush, with perfect coolness, but with the utmost celerity.

While the bear was on the ground, the fugi-

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tives had each sprung into the bush, and found a place of concealment. Redhand on the one side, and Bounce on the other, had reserved their fire; the wisdom of this was now shown. The bear made a rush at the bushes on one side, and instantly received a shot from the other. It turned at once to rush on the concealed enemy there, but, before it had made a stride in that direction, another ball was lodged in it from the opposite side. The vacillations thus produced gave the other trappers time to reload, and, before it had made up its mind which to attack, another volley was fired, and three balls took effect, Redhand and Bounce still reserving their fire as at the first.

The impotent fury of the creature was now awful to behold. It was mortally wounded; there could be no doubt as to that, for the trappers were all pretty good shots and knew where to fire, but they had not succeeded yet in reaching the seat of life. One ball had broken the bear's shoulder and the blood flowed from its wounds, while churned blood and foam dropped from its jaws.

Before another volley could be fired it made a furious rush at the three men who had kept away to the left, namely, Big Waller, Bounce, and March. There was no help for it; not having completed their loading, they had to drop their guns and run. We have already said that

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these three had diverged towards the river. It now proved to be unfortunate that they had done so, for the bank at that place jutted out into the stream in such a way that it was impossible for them to avoid leaping into the river. The bank overhung the stream and was fully twenty feet high. Big Waller, who reached it first, hesitated to take the leap. Bounce, who came next, rushed violently against him, and the two went over together, fell into the water with a tremendous splash, and sank. March came up at the instant after, and sprang far out at once with a bold unhesitating spring. The bear was so close upon the youth that for one moment they were both in the air at the same time, but the former had not gone off with a spring, he merely tumbled over, half involuntarily, so that when they struck the water there was at least a yard between them. But this was not a long space. The superior swimming powers of the bear over the man would have diminished the distance to nothing in a minute or so. Even as it was, the bear was within six inches of Marston's heels when Hawkswing and Redhand gained the edge of the bank.

Redhand was armed with a rifle — an old and trusty weapon that had been the means of saving his own life and the lives of comrades in many a doubtful encounter with beast and with man. Kneeling down, he took a rapid aim and fired. The bullet sped true. It entered the back of the

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bear's head, and the lifeless carcase floated down the stream. The three men, instantly observing the effect of the shot, turned round, and, swimming towards their late enemy, laid hold of him, and dragged and pushed him with some difficulty toward the shore.

Meanwhile Black Gibault, who had issued from his hiding-place and had witnessed Redhand's successful shot, began to caper and dance and shout in the exuberance of his glee. Most men are apt to suffer when they give way to extravagant action of any kind. Gibault forgot that he was on the edge of an overhanging bank. The concussion with which he came to the ground after the performance of a peculiarly complicated pirouette broke off the edge of the bank, and he was precipitated headlong into the river, just a yard or so from the spot where his comrades were engaged in landing the bear.

A loud laugh greeted his sudden and unexpected descent. Scrambling on shore, and laying hold of the bear's tail, he exclaimed—

Hah! mes garçons, heave away. I have come down for to give you leetle help. Splenderous bear! Pull avay!"

The bear was then dragged out of the water and stretched upon the green sward, where for some time the trappers stood round it in a picturesque group, commenting upon its size and appearance, and remarking upon the various incidents of the chase.

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As the exact dimensions of this particular bear were taken and noted down on the spot, we will give them here for the benefit of inquiring minds. It weighed, as nearly as could be guessed by men who were practised in estimating weights, 600 pounds. On its hind legs it stood 8 feet 7 inches. Round the chest it measured 5 feet 10 inches; round the neck 3 feet 11 inches. The circumference of the thickest part of the fore leg was 2 feet, and the length of each of its claws was 4¼ inches. It was whity-brown in color, and a shaggier, fiercer, uglier monster could not well be imagined.

"But, I say," cried Bounce, looking round suddenly, "wot's come o' yon 'xtraor'nary feller as ——"

Bounce paused abruptly, for at that moment his eye fell on the "'xtraor'nary feller" in question. He was seated quietly on a large stone, not many yards distant, with book on knee and pencil in hand, making a rapid sketch of the party and the surrounding scene!

"Wot is he?" inquired Bounce of Gibault, in a whisper.

"I calc'late," observed Waller, in a low voice, at the same time touching his forehead and looking mysterious; "I calc'late, he's noncombobble-fusticated."

"Perhaps," said Redhand, with a quiet laugh. "Whatever he is, it's bad manners to stand

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starin' at him," said Redhand, "so you'd better go and pick up yer guns and things, while Bounce and I skin this feller and cut off his claws."

The party separated at once, and the artist, who seemed a little disappointed at being thus checked in his work, no sooner observed the flaying process begin than he turned over the leaf of his book, and began a new sketch.

Not many minutes were required for the skinning of the bear. When it was done, it, along with all the scattered things, was placed in the canoe, and then Redhand, approaching the artist, touched his cap and said —

"You have shared our hunt to-day, sir; mayhap you'll not object to share our camp and our supper."

"Most willingly, my good friend," replied the artist, rising and holding out his hand, which the trapper shook heartily. "You seem to be trappers."

"We are, sir, at your service. It's gettin' late and we've a good bit to go yet, before we come to the place where we mean to camp, so you'd better come at once."

"Certainly; by all means; let us embark without delay," replied the artist, pocketing his sketch-book.

"Pardon me, sir," said Redhand with some hesitation, "are you alone?"

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"I am," replied the other, sadly, then, as if a sudden thought had struck him—"I had two pistols and a cloak once."

"We've picked 'em up, sir. They're in the canoe now. At least the pistols are, an' what's left o' the cloak."

"Ha! 'twas an old and cherished friend! Are you ready?"

"All ready, sir."

So saying, the old man led the way to the canoe and embarked with his strange companion. Then, pushing out into the stream just as the shades of night began to descend upon the wilderness, the trappers paddled swiftly away, wondering in their hearts who and what the stranger could be, and talking occasionally in subdued tones of the chief incidents of the exciting combat through which they had so recently passed.

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CHAPTER V.

Fiery Remarks and Cogitations. — Round the Camp Fire. — The Artist gives an Account of Himself. — Value of a Sketch-Book — Discoveries and Dark Threats. — The Bears'-claw Collar.

THERE is no doubt whatever that a western trapper knows how to make a fire. That is an axiomatic certainty. He also knows how to enjoy it. He is thoroughly conversant with it in all its phases, and with all the phenomena connected with it, from the bright little spark that flies from his flint and steel and nestles on his piece of tinder, to the great rolling flame that leaps up among the branches of the forest trees, roaring lustily as it goes out upon the night air, like a mighty spirit set free from some diminutive prison-house, rejoicing in being once more permitted to reassume its original grand dimensions.

Yes, a western trapper has a grand, a massive notion of a fire, and his actions are all in keeping with that notion. Almost every thing is small at the fountain. A mighty river usually begins in a bubbling spring or a tiny rivulet. So the trapper's initial acts are delicate. He handles the tinder gently, and guards it from damp. He fosters the spark, when caught, and blows upon it softly, and

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wraps it up in dry grass, and watches it intently as a mother might watch the life-spark of her new-born babe. But when once the flame has caught, and the bundles of little dry twigs has been placed above it, and the pile of broken sticks has been superadded, the trapper's character is changed. He grasps the ponderous hatchet, and, Homerically speaking,

> Now toils the hero: trees on trees o'erthrown,
> Falls crackling round him, and the forests groan.

These, "lopp'd and lighten'd of their branchy load," he assaults singly. Heaving the huge axe with lusty sweeping blows, he brings it down. Great wedgy splinters fly and strew the plain like autumn leaves. Then, with massive logs, full six feet long, he feeds the hungry fire until it leaps and roars in might, and glows full red and hot and huge enough to roast him a bison bull for supper, an he should feel so disposed.

Descending now from the abstract to the concrete, we would remark that whether the reader does or does not admit the general proposition, that western trappers are preëminently up to fire (not to mention smoke or snuff), he cannot deny the fact that Big Waller, the Yankee trapper, was peculiarly gifted in that. On the evening of the day on which occurred the memorable encounter with the grisly bear, as related in the last chapter, that stalwart individual heaved his pon-

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derous axe and felled the trees around him in a way that would have paled the ineffectual fires of Ulysses himself, and would probably have induced that hero not only to cease cutting trees, but to commence cutting his stick thenceforth from the field of competition! March Marston meanwhile kindled the spark and nursed the infant flame. The others busied themselves in the various occupations of the camp. Some cut down pine branches, and strewed them a foot deep in front of the fire, and trod them down until a soft elastic couch was formed on which to spread their blankets. Others cut steaks of venison and portions of the grisly bear, and set them up on the end of sticks before the fire to roast, and others made fast and secured the canoe and her lading.

The artist, seating himself beside the fire, just near enough to profit by the light, but far enough away to obtain a general view of every thing and everybody, proceeded with enthusiasm to sketch the whole affair, collectively and in detail. He devoted his chief attention, however, to Big Waller. He "caught" that gigantic Yankee in every conceivable action and attitude. He photographed him, we might almost say, with his legs apart, the hatchet high above his head, and every muscle tense and rigid, preliminary to a sweeping blow. He "took" him with a monstrous pile of logs on his brawny shoulder; he portrayed him resting for a moment in the midst of his toil; he

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even attempted to delineate him tumbling over one of the logs and hurling a shoulder-load upon the ground; but he failed utterly in the last attempt, being quite destitute of comical perception, and he did not finally conclude until Gibault went forward and informed him that supper was ready. Then he shut up his book, and taking his place beside the trappers, began supper.

"This is comfortable — this is pleasant," remarked the artist, as he sat down before the warm blaze, and applied himself with infinite relish to the venison-steak placed before him by Bounce. "You live well here it would seem."

This latter remark was addressed to Hawkswing, who sat close beside him; but that imperturbable worthy shook his head gravely.

"He don't understand ye," interposed Bounce, "knows nothin' but his own mother-tongue. We *do* live pretty middlin' so so hereabouts when we ain't starvin', w'ich it isn't for me to deny is sometimes the case, d'ye see."

Bounce stopped his own talk at this point by stuffing his mouth so full of meat that no word, not even a word of one syllable, could have forced itself out, had it tried ever so much. A long silence now ensued, during which the clack of seven pairs of active jaws was the only sound that broke upon the ear. It might have been observed, however, that all eyes were fixed more or less wonderingly on the stranger. Big Waller

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in particular looked him, figuratively speaking, through and through. He did not remove his eyes off him for an instant, but devoured his food with somewhat the expression of a dog that expects his bone to be snatched from him.

"Try a duck," said March Marston to the artist, observing that he had finished his steak.

"Thank you," answered the artist, accepting the proffered bird which happened to be a teal, and beginning to carve it with a pen-knife. He had no fork, but used the fingers of his left hand instead.

Silence again ensued.

"Try another," said March again.

The artist hesitated.

"You'd better; it's a fat un."

"N—no. No!" said the artist, shutting up his knife with an air of decision. "No, thank you, I always advocate moderation, and it would ill become me to set an example of glut—— ah, of the reverse.

"Wal, stranger," said Waller, who, having finished eating, wiped his mouth with a tuft of grass, and began to fill his pipe. "You *do* come out in the way o' moderation rather powerful. Why a teal duck an' a ven'son steak is barely enough to stop a feller dyin' right off. I guess a down-east baby o' six months old 'ud swab up that an' ax for more."

"Nevertheless it is quite enough for me,"

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replied the artist, leaning down on his elbow. "I could, indeed, eat more; but I hold that man should always rise from table capable of eating more, if required."

Here was a proposition that it had not entered into the minds of the trappers, even in their most transcendental efforts of abstruse meditation, to think of! They gazed at each other in amazement.

"Wot! not eat yer fill w'en ye git the chance," exclaimed Bounce.

"No, certainly not."

"I say, stranger, when did you feed last?" inquired Big Waller."

"Why do you ask?" said the artist, looking quickly up.

"'Cause I wants to know."

The artist smiled. "My last meal was eaten yesterday morning."

"Ha! I vas sure ob dat," cried Gibault; "your face look like as if you be full ob starvation."

"An' *wot* did ye eat last?" inquired Bounce laying down his pipe and looking at their guest with much interest not unmingled with pity.

"I breakfasted on a little bird about the size of a hen's egg. I know not what it is named, but it was excellently flavored. I relished it much."

On hearing this, Gibault pressed his hand on

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his stomach, as if the mere thought of such a delicately-minute breakfast caused him pain in that region.

"I say, stranger," broke in Waller, in a tone of voice that seemed to imply that he was determined to be at the bottom of this mystery and would stand it no longer — "Wot's your name?"

"Theodore Bertram," replied the artist, without hesitation.

"Where do you come from?"

"From England."

"Where air you agoin' to?"

"To the Rocky Mountains."

"Wot for to do there?"

"You are inquisitive, friend," said Bertram, smiling; "but I have no reason for concealing my object in travelling here, — it is to sketch, and shoot, and take notes, and witness the works of the Almighty in the wilderness. I hold it to be an object worthy the ambition of a great man to act the part of pioneer to the missionary and the merchant in nature's wildest and most inaccessible regions; and although I pretend not to greatness, I endeavor, humbly, to do what I can."

"No one can do more than that," said Redhand, regarding the young enthusiast with interest. "But surely you have not travelled to this out-o'-the-way place without a guide?"

Bertram pointed up to the stars.

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"These are my guides," said he; "the man who can read the heavens needs no guide."

"But that book ain't always readable," said Redhand; "when clouds are flying what do you do then?"

"Fur-traders in the far north have taught me how to ascertain the north by the bark on the trees; besides this I have a bosom friend who always points the way." So saying he pulled a small compass from an inner pocket and held it up.

"Good," rejoined Redhand; "but a compass is not food, neither will it kill game. Have you nought but them pistols?"

"I have none other arms now but these, save this good sword. They will serve to defend me in the hour of need, I trust; though now that I have seen the grisly bear I should doubt my chance of success were I to cope with him alone. I should imagine that monster to be worse even than the Wild Man of the West himself."

"The Wild Man o' the West!" echoed March Marston, eagerly; "have you seen *him?*"

"Nay, verily; but I have heard of him," replied the artist, smiling, "and a strangely ferocious creature he must be, if all that's said of him be correct. But, to say truth, I believe the stories told of him are idle tales. Indeed, I do not believe there is such a man at all!"

March Marston's countenance fell. No Wild

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Man of the West at all! The bare possibility of such a crushing blow to all his romantic hopes and dreams caused his heart to sink. Bertram observed the change in his countenance, and, quickly divining the cause, added, "But I am of a sceptical turn of mind, and do not easily believe unless I see. There is one thing I have observed, however, which is in favor of his existence."

"What's that?" inquired March, brightening up.

"That the nearer one comes to his reputed dwelling-place, this wild man assumes smaller and more natural proportions. I first heard of him in the Red River Prairies, where he is held to be a giant who devours men as well as brutes. As I came nearer to the Missouri, I found that the people there do not believe him to be either a cannibal or a giant, but assert that he is an enormously tall and powerful man, exceedingly fierce and the sworn enemy of the whole human race; a species of Cain, whose hand is against every man and every man's hand against him. The last white man I met — about two weeks ago — told me he had been with a tribe of Indians, some of whom had seen him, and they said that he was indeed awfully wild, but that he was not cruel, — on the contrary, he had been known to have performed one or two kind deeds to some who had fallen into his power."

"Most astonishin'!" exclaimed Gibault, who

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sat open-mouthed and open-eyed listening to this account of the Wild Man of the West.

For some time the party round the camp-fire sat smoking in silence, ruminating on what had been said. Then Big Waller broke the silence with one of his abrupt questions, —

"But, I say, stranger, *how* did you come here?"

Bertram looked up without speaking. Then, settling himself comfortably in a reclining position, with his back against a tree, he said, —

"I will relieve your curiosity. Listen: I am, as I have said, an Englishman. My father and mother are dead. I have no brothers or sisters, and but few relations. Possessing, as I do, a small independence, I am not obliged to work for my living. I have, therefore, come to the conclusion that it is my duty to work for my fellow-men. Of course, I do not mean to deny that every man who works for his living, works also for his fellow-men. What I mean is, that I hold myself bound to apply myself to such works as other men have not leisure to undertake, and the profit of which will go direct to mankind without constituting my livelihood on its passage. To open up the unknown wilderness has ever been my ambition. For that purpose I have come to these wild regions. My enthusiasm on quitting my native land was unbounded. But——"

Here Bertram paused and gazed dreamily at the

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glowing embers of the camp-fire with an expression that led the trappers to infer that experience had somewhat moderated his enthusiasm. After a few minutes he resumed: —

"I have done wrong to make this venture alone. On reaching Canada I succeeded, through the kindness of the governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, in obtaining a passage in one of the company's canoes through that series of rivers and lakes by which the fur-traders penetrate into the regions of the far north. Arrived at Red River Settlement, I pushed forward on horeback over the plains with a small party of horsemen to the head-waters of the Saskatchwan. Here I succeeded in engaging a party of twelve men, composed of half-breeds and Indians, and set out on a journey of exploration over the prairies toward the Rocky Mountains. Circumstances led me to modify my plans. We diverged towards the south, and finally came to within a few days' journey of the region in which we now are. We were suddenly surprised one night by a war-party of Blackfoot Indians. My men had grown careless. They neglected to keep a strict watch, and before we were aware that danger threatened us, all our horses were carried off.

"This was a terrible calamity. My men declared that it was impossible to advance without horses, and refused to accompany me any further. I remonstrated in vain, then, filled with indigna-

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tion at their cowardice, I left them and pursued my journey alone. Since then I have seen only one man, a trapper, who was travelling south to the settlements. He offered to take me with him, but I declined. I felt that no great or good work could ever be accomplished by the man who turns back at the first disaster; so he left me. I have suffered somewhat. I am, unfortunately, a bad shot, and although game is everywhere abundant, I cannot kill it. I have subsisted hitherto on small birds; but my powder and lead are almost expended. Had I not fallen in with you I know not what I should have done."

To this narrative the trappers listened with respectful attention, for, despite the feelings of pity — almost bordering on contempt — with which they regarded the stranger's weapons and his knowledge, or rather ignorance, of woodcraft, they could not help reverencing the simple-minded enthusiasm in a good cause, that had conducted the artist so deep into a savage land in which he was evidently unfitted, either by nature or training, to travel.

"But I say, stranger," said Big Waller, "wot *do* ye mean by openin' up the country? It ain't a oyster, that ye can open it up with a big knife I guess.

"There, friend, you are wrong. This country does, indeed, resemble an oyster; and I hope by the aid of the mighty levers of knowledge and

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enterprise to open it up. I mean to take notes and sketches, and, if spared, return to my native land and publish the result of my observations. I do not, indeed, expect that the public will buy my work; but I shall publish a large edition at my own cost, and present copies to all the influential men in the kingdom."

The trappers opened their eyes wider than ever at this.

"What! Make a book?" cried Redhand.

"Even so."

"Will it have pictures?" eagerly asked March, who regarded the artist with rapidly increasing veneration.

"Ay, it will be profusely illustrated."

"Wot! pictures o' grisly bears?" inquired Bounce.

"Of course."

"An' men?" cried Big Waller.

"And men also, if I fall in with them."

"Then here's one, I guess," cried the bold Yankee, combing out his matted locks hastily with his fingers, and sitting up in what he conceived to be a proper position. "Here you are, sir. I'm your man; fix me off slick. Only think! Big Waller in a book — a *raal* book!"

He chuckled immensely at the bright prospect of immortality that had suddenly opened up to him.

"I have drawn you already, friend," said Bertram.

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"Draw'd me already?"

"Ay, there you are," he replied, handing his sketch-book to the trapper, who gazed at his own portrait with unmitigated satisfaction. Turning over the leaf, he came unexpectedly on the likeness of Gibault, which, being a truthful representation, was almost a caricature. Big Waller burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter at this. He rolled over on his back and yelled with delight. His yell being quite in keeping with his body, the din was so tremendous that Bounce roared —

"Stop yer noïse, ye buffalo!"

But Waller didn't hear him; so March Marston effected the desired object by stuffing the corner of a blanket into his mouth, and smothering his face in its folds.

Bertram's sketch-book was now examined, and for nearly an hour proved a source of the most intense interest and amusement to these unsophisticated trappers. In those days few, very few men of education had succeeded in penetrating far into the western wilderness; and although the trappers there knew what books and pictures meant, they had seen but few of them in the course of their lives, and none of those few had any reference to the wild country in which their lives were spent.

It may be imagined, then, with what delight and excitement they now, for the first time,

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beheld scenes of their own beloved woods and prairies, as well as their own rough forms, vividly sketched by a master-hand. One of the most interesting points in the inspection of the sketch-book was, that old Redhand recognized almost every one of the landscapes as spots with which he was well acquainted; and as Bertram had sketched most diligently as he travelled along, Redhand told him that by the aid of that book, without compass or any thing else, he could trace his route backward, step by step, to the Saskatchwan river. Moreover, he described to the artist accurately many scenes which were near to those he had sketched, and gradually fell to talking about adventures and rencontres he had had in many of them, so that at last it became evident there would be no proposal to go to rest that night at all unless some wise one of the party should remind the others that another day's toil lay before them in the course of a few hours.

At length they took up their pipes, which had been forgotten in the excitement, and refilled them with the intention of having a last quiet whiff before lying down.

"Ho!" exclaimed Redhand, who still continued to turn over the pages of the book, "here's a face I know. Where saw ye that Indian?"

"I cannot easily tell where it was we met him; but I remember well that it was just a

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day's ride from the spot where our horses were stolen."

"Were there others with him?"

"No, he was alone."

"Ha! at least he said so, I fancy."

"Yes, he did; and I have no reason to doubt him."

"You're not used to the ways o' the red-skin, sir," replied Redhand, looking meditatively at the fire. "Did he chance to mention his name?"

"Oh, yes, he called himself Big Snake, at least one of my men translated it so."

A significant smile overspread the old trapper's face as he replied—

"I thought as much. A greater thief and villain does not disgrace the prairies. He's the man that took yer horses; sich a fellow as that never goes about alone; he's always got a tail following him as black as himself. But I'll see if we can't pay the rascal off in his own coin."

"How so?" inquired Bertram. "He must be far from this spot."

"Not so far as you think. I know his haunts, and could take you to them in a few days overland; but it'll take longer by the river, and we can't quit our canoe just now."

"But, good friend," said Bertram, quietly, "I cannot presume on your hospitality so far as to

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expect you to carry me along with you for the purpose of redressing my wrongs."

"Make your mind easy on that pint," returned Redhand, "we'll talk of it in the mornin'."

While the old trapper and the artist were conversing, Bounce had busied himself in stringing the claws of the grisly bear on a strip of deer-skin, for the purpose of making a collar. A necklace of this description is very highly prized among Indians, especially when the claws are large.

While it was being made, Gibault sighed so deeply once or twice, that March suggested he must be in love.

"So I is," sighed Gibault.

"That's interesting," remarked March; "who with?"

"Ay, that's it," said Bounce; "out with her name, lad. No one ought never to be ashamed o' bein' in love. It's a glorious state o' mind an' body as a feller should gratilate hisself on havin'. Who be ye in love wi', lad?"

"Vid dat necklace," replied Gibault, sighing again heavily.

"Oh! if that's all, ye don't need to look so blue, for it's yer own by rights," said Bounce. "I'm jist doin' it up for ye."

"Non; it cannot be mine," returned Gibault.

"How so?" inquired Waller, "ye arned it, didn't ye? Drew first blood I calc'late."

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"Non, I not draw de fuss blood. Mais, I vill hab chance again no doubt. Monsieur Bertram he draw fuss blood."

"Ho, ho!" cried Waller, in surprise. "You didn't tell us that before. Come, I'm glad on't."

"What!" exclaimed Bertram, "the necklace mine? there must be some mistake. I certainly fired my pistol at the bear, but it seemed to have had no effect whatever."

"Gibault," said Bounce, emphatically, "did you fire *at all!*"

"Non, pour certain, cause de gun he not go off."

"Then," continued Bounce, handing the much-coveted necklace to Bertram, "the thing b'longs to you, sir, for that bar comed up wounded, an' as he couldn't ha' wounded hisself, *you* must ha' done it — there."

The young man positively refused, for some time, to accept of the necklace, saying, that as Gibault had tracked and discovered the bear, it certainly belonged to him; but Gibault as positively affirmed that he would not disgrace himself by wearing what belonged rightfully to another man; and as the other trappers confirmed what their comrade said, Bertram was at last fain to accept of a trophy which, to say truth, he was in his heart most anxious to possess.

At the termination of this amicable dispute,

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each man rolled himself in his blanket and lay down to sleep with his feet to the fire. Being in a part of the country where there were very few Indians, and these few on pretty good terms with the white trappers, no watch was set. Bertram lay down with his tattered cloak around him, and, taking a little book from his pocket, read it, or appeared to read it, till he fell asleep, — on observing which, March Marston crept noiselessly to his side, and, lying gently down beside him, covered him with a portion of his own blanket. Ere long the camp was buried in repose.

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CHAPTER VI.

The Dangers of the Wilderness. — An Unexpected Catastrophe, which necessitates a Change of Plans. — A Descent upon Robbers proposed and agreed to.

THERE are few passages in the Holy Writ more frequently brought to remembrance by the incidents of every-day life than this — "Ye know not what a day or an hour may bring forth." The uncertainty of sublunary things is proverbial, whether in the city or the wilderness, whether among the luxuriously-nurtured sons and daughters of civilization, or among the toil-worn wanderers in the midst of savage life. To each and all there is, or may be, sunshine to-day and cloud to-morrow; gladness to-day, sadness to-morrow. There is no such thing as perpetual felicity in the world of matter. A nearer approach to it may perhaps be made in the world of mind; but, like perpetual motion, it is not to be absolutely attained in this world of ours. Those who fancy that it is to be found in the wilderness, are hereby warned, by one who has dwelt in savage lands, that its habitation is not there.

March Marston thought it was! On the morning after the night whose close we have described,

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he awoke refreshed, invigorated, and buoyant with a feeling of youthful strength and health. Starting up, he met the glorious sun face to face, as it rose above the edge of a distant blue hill, and the meeting almost blinded him. There was a saffron hue over the eastern landscape that caused it to appear like the plains of Paradise. Lakelets in the prairies glittered in the midst of verdant foliage; ponds in the hollows lay, as yet unillumined, like blots of ink; streams and rivulets gleamed as they flowed round wooded knolls, or sparkled silvery white as they leaped over rocky obstructions. The noble river, on the banks of which the camp had been made, flowed with a calm sweep through the richly-varied country — refreshing to look upon and pleasant to hear, as it murmured on its way to join the "Father of waters." The soft roar of a far-distant cataract was heard mingling with the cries of innumerable water-fowl that had risen an hour before to enjoy the first breathings of the young day. To March Marston's ear it seemed as though all Nature, animate and inanimate, were rejoicing in the beneficence of its Creator.

The youth's reverie was suddenly broken by the approach of Theodore Bertram.

"Good morrow, friend," said the latter, grasping March's hand and shaking it heartily. "You are early astir. Oh, what a scene! What heavenly colors! What a glorious expanse of beauty!"

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The artist's hand moved involuntarily to the pouch in which he was wont to carry his sketch-book, but he did not draw it forth; his soul was too deeply absorbed in admiration to permit of his doing aught but gaze in silence.

"This repays my toils," he resumed, soliloquizing rather than speaking to March. "'Twere worth a journey such as I have taken, twice repeated, to witness such a scene as this."

"Ay, aint it grand?" said March, delighted to find such congenial enthusiasm in the young painter.

Bertram turned his eyes on his companion, and, in doing so, observed the wild rose at his side.

"Ah! sweet rose," he said, stooping eagerly down to smell it,

> "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

"He was no poet who wrote that, anyhow," observed March, with a look of disdain.

"You are wrong, friend. He was a good poet and true."

"Do you mean to tell me that the sweetness o' that rose is *wasted* here?"

"Nay, I do not say that. The poet did not mean to imply that its sweetness is utterly wasted, but to assert the fact that, as far as civilized man is concerned, it is so."

"'Civilized man,'" echoed March, turning ur

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his nose (a difficult feat, by the way, for his nose by nature turned down). "An' pray what's 'civilized man' that he should think every thing's wasted that don't go in at his own eyes, or up his own nose, or down his own throat? eh!' Bertram laughed slightly (he never laughed heartily). "You are a severe critic, friend."

"I don't know, and I don't care, what sort o' cricket I am; but this I do know, that roses are as little wasted here as in your country — mayhap not so much. Why, I tell ye I've seen the *bars* smell 'em."

"Indeed."

"Ay, an' eat 'em too!"

"That was not taking a poetical view of them," suggested Bertram.

"Perhaps not, but it was uncommonly practical;" returned March, laughing.

The conversation was abruptly terminated at this point by a flock of wild ducks, which, ignorant of the presence of the two youths, swept close past their heads with a startling *whirr*. The artist leaped backwards, and March, partly in the exuberant glee of his heart, and partly to relieve his own startled feelings, gave utterance to a hideous yell.

"Hi! hallo!" roared Big Waller, starting up and replying to the yell with compound interest. "Wot's to do? Bars or savages — which? Oh! *savages* I see," he added, rubbing his eyes,

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as he observed March laughing at him. "Ha! lad, d'ye know there's a sort o' critter in other diggins o' this here world as they calls a hi-eeno, or somethin' o' that sort, as can *laugh*, it can; so you're not the only beast as can do it, d'ye see!"

The camp was now thoroughly roused, and the trappers set about making preparations for a start; but little was said. It is generally the case at early morning — at least among healthy men who have work to do before breakfast in the wilderness — that tongues are disinclined to move. After the first somewhat outrageous and rather unusual burst, no one spoke again, while they carried their goods down to the water's edge, except in a short grumpy way when an order or a remark was needful. In about ten minutes arter the utterance of Big Waller's roar, they were in their places in the little red canoe, paddling blithely up the river.

Bertram's place in the canoe was the centre. He was placed there as a passenger, but, not being by any means of a lazy disposition, he relieved all the men by turns, and thus did a good share of the work during the day.

Toward evening the travellers came to a cataract, which effectually barred their further progress, and rendered a portage necessary. Just above the cataract there was a short stretch of comparatively smooth water, in which, however, the current was very strong. Immediately above

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that there was a rapid of considerable length and strength, which boiled furiously among the rocks, and seemed to be impassable to a canoe. After close inspection of it, however, Redhand and Bounce, who were tacitly recognized as joint leaders of the party, agreed that the canoe could easily enough be hauled up by means of a line. To make a long portage, and so avoid the whole obstruction, was desirable; but the precipitous nature of the banks at that place rendered the carrying of the canoe and goods a work not only of severe labor, but of considerable danger.

The mode of proceeding having been settled, all hands went to work without delay. The goods were carried to the top of the fall, which was about fifteen feet high, then the canoe was shouldered by Waller and Bounce, and soon it floated in a calm eddy near the head of the cataract. Having replaced the cargo, a strong line or rope was fastened to the bows, and Redhand and Bounce proceeded to take their places in the canoe, in order to guide it through the rapid, while the others were engaged in hauling on the track-line.

"Stay," cried March Marston, as Bounce was stepping in, "let me go in the canoe, Bounce. You know well enough that I can manage it; besides, you're a heavy buffalo, and more able to track than I."

"Nay, lad," replied Bounce, shaking his head,

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"You'll only run the risk o' gettin' a wet skin — mayhap somethin' worse."

"Now, that's too bad. D'ye think nobody can manage a canoe but yourself? Come, Redhand, do let me go."

"It's not safe, boy. The rapid looks bad, and you're not much used to the bow-paddle."

"Tut, 'nonsense," exclaimed March, pushing Bounce aside and stepping into the canoe. "Now, hold on."

Before the men on the bank of the river were well aware of what the reckless youth was about, he shoved the bow of the canoe off. The instant it passed the still water of the eddy and caught the powerful stream, the light bark darted like an arrow from the bank, and Redhand was obliged to use his paddle with the utmost dexterity, while the men on shore had to haul on the line with all their might, to prevent it being swept over the brink of the fall. In a second, however, the danger was past, and, putting their strength to the track-line, they dragged the canoe slowly but steadily up-stream, while Redhand and March guided it past rocks and dangerous eddies. Seeing that the youth used his paddle dexterously, Bounce, after a little thought, resolved to let him encounter the more dangerous rapid above. Redhand silently came to the same conclusion, though he felt uneasy and blamed himself for allowing the ardor of the boy to get the better of him.

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"March is a bold fellow," observed Bertram, who walked immediately behind Bounce, hauling on the line like the rest.

"Bold he is, sir," replied Bounce; "an' if ye'd seed him, as I did not many weeks agone, a-ridin' on the back of a buffalo bull, ye'd mayhap say he was more nor that."

"Hah! he is mad!" cried Gibault, who, although the last in the line of tracksmen, was sharp-eared, and overheard the conversation.

"Don't talk, Gibault," interposed Big Waller, "you need all the wind in your little carcase, I guess, to enable you to steam ahead."

"Oui, mon dear ami, you is right — I do ver' much require all mine steam — mine spirits — for to push such a heavy, useless hulk as you before me."

"Here's a steep bit, lads; mind your eye, Hawkswing," said Bounce, as the Indian who led the party began to ascend a steep part of the bank, where the footing was not secure, owing to the loose, gravelly nature of the soil.

As they advanced, the path along the bank became narrower, and the cliff itself so precipitous that it seemed as if a jerk on the line would drag the men off and send them rolling down into the flood below, in the midst of which the canoe was buffeting its way through the hissing foam.

Bertram, who was unused to such a position of comparative danger, and whose head was not

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capable of standing the sight of a precipice descending from his very feet into a roaring stream, began to feel giddy, and would have given the world to return; but he felt ashamed to confess his weakness, and endeavored, by gazing earnestly into the bank at his side, to steady himself, hoping that the nature of the track would improve as they advanced. Instead of this being the case, it became worse at every step, and the trackers were at length obliged to proceed cautiously along a ledge of rock that barely afforded them foothold. Bertram now felt an almost irresistible desire to turn his head to the left and glance at the river below; yet he knew that if he should do so, he would become utterly unable to advance another yard. While engaged in this struggle it suddenly occurred to him that it was impossible now to turn, no matter how nervous he should become, as the path was too narrow to permit one of the party to pass another! He became deadly pale, and his heart sank at the thought. Little did the hardy trappers think, as they plodded silently along, that such an agonizing conflict was going on in the breast of one of their number! A slight groan escaped him in spite of his utmost efforts to restrain himself. Bounce looked back in surprise.

"Hey! wot's to do, sir?"

"No matter; lead on — I will follow," said Bertram, sternly, between his clenched teeth.

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"Hallo! up there," shouted Redhand, who was at that moment, along with March, exerting his utmost strength in order to keep the canoe off a rock over which the water was bursting in volumes of thick foam; "haul away! haul away! we're just about up."

The shout attracted Bertram's attention: he turned his eyes involuntarily towards the river. Instantly his brain swam round; he staggered, and would have fallen over the bank, had not Big Waller, who was close behind, observed his situation and caught him by the collar. In doing so he was compelled to let go his hold of the line. The additional strain thus suddenly cast upon Gibault wrenched the line from his grasp with a degree of violence that wellnigh hurled him into the river. Bounce and Hawkswing held on for one moment, but the canoe, having been eased off a little, caught a sweep of the rapid, and went out with a dart that the united strength of the whole party could not have checked. The two men had to let go to save themselves, and in a shorter time than it takes to relate, the canoe went down the river towards the fall dancing like a cork on the heaving spray, while the old man and the youth stood up in the bow and stern wielding their paddles, now on one side, now on the other, with ceaseless rapidity in their efforts to avoid being dashed to pieces on the rocks.

The sight of this catastrophe, superadded to his

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already agonized feelings, caused the unhappy artist to swoon. Gibault, on seeing the line let go, turned instantly, and sprang like a deer along the track they had been following, intending to render what assistance he could to his comrades at the foot of the rapid. The others could not follow, because of Big Waller and the artist, who obstructed the path. Seeing this, the powerful Yankee seized Bertram round the waist, and, heaving him on his shoulder as one would swing a child, followed in Gibault's footsteps as fast as he could run.

The distance to the spot whence they had commenced to track the canoe was not great, but before they reached it the frail craft had been shattered against a rock, and was now hurrying along with the scattered cargo and the two men toward the fall, to pass over which involved certain destruction.

There is nothing more uncertain, however, than the action of the whirling eddies of a great rapid. True, the general flow of its body of water is almost always the same, but its superficial billows are more variable — now tossing a drifting log to the right, anon to the left, and casting it ashore, or dragging it with a fearful violence into the raging current. Although there was only the canoe's length between the old trapper and the youth when they were left struggling in the water, they were swept in totally different directions. Red-

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hand was hurled violently into the eddy, where the canoe had lain before the ascent was commenced, and was dragged safe to land by his comrades. March Marston, on the other hand, was swept out near to the main current, and would, in two seconds more, have been carried over the fall, had he not, with wonderful presence of mind and an almost superhuman exertion of muscle, dashed into an eddy which was formed by a rock about fifty yards from the top of the fall. The rock was completely covered with the bursting spray, so that it formed no resting-place, and it, with the partial eddy that tailed away from it, was about twenty yards from the shore, where the trappers stood gazing in horror at their companion as he struggled bravely to maintain his position by swimming; but to cross those twenty yards of gushing water, so as to afford him aid, seemed beyond the power of man.

Men bred in the wilderness are not usually slow to act in cases of danger where action is possible. Each man was revolving in fervid haste every plan that seemed likely to afford succor. Red-hand's quick eye observed that the rocks at the edge of the fall, on the side of the river on which they stood, projected out so far that a straight line drawn from the eddy to the fall would pass within a yard of them, and that, consequently, if March would pull straight across the stream and make vigorously for the bank, he might hit the

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point of rocks referred to before being carried over.

"Down, some of you," he cried, "to the point, an' be ready to catch him; I'll shout to him what to do."

Big Waller and Gibault darted away. Poor Bertram, having recovered, remained gazing in speechless agony at March, who, having made several fruitless efforts to seize hold of the sunken rock, was evidently growing weaker. Bounce also remained to gaze, as if he had lost all his wonted self-command.

"Ho! March!" shouted Redhand. "Dash into the stream — straight for me — with all yer might; don't be afraid, lad! do it boldly!" But March heard not. The rush of water about him deadened all other sounds.

In an instant Bounce started at full speed up the river, plunged into it, and, descending with fearful rapidity, swung round into the eddy behind the stone almost before his companions could divine what he meant to do.

Even in that moment of terrible suspense March Marston looked with an expression of surprise at his friend as he swam up beside him. Bounce did not waste time or words; he merely raised one hand for a second, and, pointing to the bank of the river, cried — "Push for it — 'tis your only chance!"

March Marston made no reply, but at once

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obeyed; yet so exhausted was he, that, in the effort, he lost strength and sank. Bounce was prepared for this. He seized him by the hair and struck out with the energy of despair. A moment more and he was within a foot of the brink of the fall, — but also, within a foot of the point of rock on which Big Waller was lying at full length, part of his body overhanging the cataract, his arms extended, and Gibault and Hawkswing holding him firmly by the legs. Bounce caught his comrade's hand, and swung close in to the bank, while with the other hand he continued to grasp March by the hair of the head. The force of the current was so great, however, that not one of the party dared move, and it seemed for a moment as if all of them would be lost, when Bertram rushed forward, and, seizing Bounce by the arm dragged him still nearer the bank, and relieved the strain upon the others. Just then, Redhand came to the rescue, and in another moment the two men were safe upon the land.

Poor Bertram fell upon his knees, and while he thanked God for the deliverance of his companions, sobbed like a little child.

For some time the trappers spoke little. Accustomed though they were to danger, they were solemnized by the recent narrow escape from sudden death. Perhaps, too, their minds were more deeply affected than usual with a sense of their dependence upon the living God, by the

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example and the heartfelt, unrestrained thanksgiving of Bertram. But men whose lives are spent in the midst of alarms are not long seriously affected, even by the most solemn events. The trappers quickly recurred to their present circumstances, which were, in truth, of a nature calculated to fill them with anxiety, and cause them to bend the powers of their quick wits and iron energies to the simple consideration of how they were to subsist and how proceed on their journey.

"First of all," said Redhand, quickly, "we must try what we can recover of our odds and ends."

"Right," cried Bounce, who was none the worse for his late gallant exertions; "the current won't stop for no man; an' the bales ain't likely to stem it o' their own accord till we're ready to look for 'em."

Saying this, he set off down the river at a run, followed by all the others, including March, who, after wringing the water from his garments, and resting a few minutes, felt as well and strong as ever. But, alas! their losses were grievous and irreparable. Their little bundles of spare clothing and trinkets for trading with, or conciliating the Indians, were indeed saved, but their guns and all their ammunition were gone. All that remained to them of the latter were the few charges of powder in the horns suspended round

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their necks, and a few slugs and bullets in their pouches. The only fire-arms left were Bertram's cavalry pistols.

As for the canoe, it was smashed so thoroughly, that only a very few shreds of bark were cast up on the shore; but entangled with these shreds they were happy to find several of their steel traps — a most fortunate circumstance, as it held out hopes that they might still be enabled to prosecute to some extent the main object of their expedition.

As each man had been in the habit of carrying his axe and knife in his belt, those indispensable implements of the backwoodsman were saved; but the loss of guns and ammunition was a very severe misfortune, and one which, for at least half an hour after every attempt to recover them had failed, cast a damp over the spirits of the whole party. But these men had neither time nor inclination to hang down their heads and sigh. Big Waller, being a careless individual by nature, was the first to regain somewhat of his wonted tone and manner. Sitting on a grassy knoll, on which all the party had been resting for some time after their fruitless exertions, in moody silence, Waller looked up suddenly and said — "Who's afraid?"

As no one happened at that moment to be exhibiting symptoms of terror, and there was no apparent cause for fear, the question seemed

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irrelevant. We therefore conclude that the bold Yankee meant by it to imply that *he*, at least, was not afraid of *circumstances*, no matter how disastrous or heartrending they might be. Having said this, he looked at the faces of his companions one by one. The last face he looked at was that of Gibault Noir, and it wore such a lugubrious aspect of hopeless melancholy that Big Waller burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, and Bounce, without knowing why, joined them.

"Well, it's of no use looking blue about it," said March Marston, making an effort to cheer up; "the question to be settled now is, — What's to be done?"

"Ay, *that* is the question," observed Bertram, gravely.

"Wall now, that *bein'* the kee-westion," said Waller, "who's a-goin' to answer it? There's a chance now, lads; don't all speak at once."

"Right; thar's wot it is," observed Bounce, nodding; "that's the feelosophy on it. W'en a feller's turned upside down, wot's he a-goin to do nixt? You can't put no other construction on it in this here wurld."

Redhand, who had been ruminating abstractedly for some minutes, now looked round on his comrades and said —

"Here's a plan for you, lads. That outrageous villain the Big Snake lives, for the most

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part, in a pretty little spot just three days' march from this place. He stole, as ye all know, the horses belongin' to Mr. Bertram's party. Well, I propose that we shud go an' call on him, an' make him stand an' redeliver. What say you?" "Agreed," cried Waller, tossing his cap into the air. "Hurrah!" shouted March Marston. In one way or another, each gave his consent to the plan of making a descent upon the robbers and causing them to make restitution.

The plans of backwoodsmen, once formed, are always quickly put in execution. They had no arrangements to make, no portmanteaus to pack, no difficulties in the way to overcome. Each man strapped a portion of the remaining property on his broad shoulders, and, pushing into the forest with vigorous strides, they were soon far from the spot where their late disaster had occurred, and gradually drew near to the wild glens and gorges of the Rocky Mountains.

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CHAPTER VII.

A wolfish Way of killing Buffalo described. — Bounce becomes Metaphysical on the Fine Arts. — Butchering enlarged on. — A glorious Feast, and sketching under Difficulties.

ONE of the ancient poets has said that wandering through the wild woods is a pleasant thing. At least, if one of them has not said that, he ought to have said it, and, certainly, many of them must have thought it, whether they said it or no. Undoubtedly, if future historians record faithfully all that has been said and written from the commencement of time to the period in which they flourish, they will embalm the fact that at least one prose writer of the present day has enunciated that incontrovertible proposition.

But we go a step further. We assert positively that wandering through the wild woods is a healthy as well as a pleasant sort of thing. The free air of the mountains and prairies is renovating, the perfumes of the forests are salubrious; while the constantly recurring necessity for leaping and scrambling is good for the muscles, and the occasional tripping over roots, tumbling into holes, scratching one's face and banging one's shins and

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THE WOLF AND THE BUFFALOES.

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toes against stumps, is good for — though somewhat trying to — the temper.

Further still — we affirm that wandering through the wild woods is a funny thing. Any one who had observed our friends March Marston, and Redhand, and Bounce, and Big Waller, and Black Gibault, the trappers, and Bertram the artist, and Hawkswing the Indian, one beautiful afternoon, not long after the day on which they lost their canoe, would have admitted, without hesitation, that wandering through the wild woods was, among other things, a funny thing.

On the beautiful afternoon referred to, the first six individuals above named were huddled together in a promiscuous heap, behind a small bush, in such a confused way that an ignorant spectator might have supposed that Bounce's head belonged to Big Waller's body, and the artist's shoulders to Redhand's head, and their respective legs and arms to no one individually, but to all collectively in a miscellaneous sort of way. The fact was that the bush behind which they were huddled was almost too small to conceal them all, and, being a solitary bush in the midst of a little plain of about a half a mile in extent, they had to make the most of it and the least of themselves. It would have been a refreshing sight for a moralist to have witnessed this instance of man — whose natural tendency is to try to look big — thus voluntarily endeavoring to look as small as possible!

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This bundle of humanity was staring through the bush, with, as the saying is, all its eyes, that is, with six pairs of — or twelve individual — eyes; and they were staring at a wolf — an enormous wolf — that was slowly walking away from the bush behind which they were ensconced! It was a very singular wolf indeed — one that was well calculated to excite surprise in the breast even of trappers. There was something radically wrong with that wolf, especially about the legs. Its ears and head were all right, and it had a tail, a very good tail for a wolf; but there was a strange unaccountable lump under its neck, and its fore legs bent the wrong way at the knees, and it seemed to have long feet trailing behind its hind legs, besides being otherwise misshapen. The mystery is explained when we state that this wolf was none other than Hawkswing, down on his hands and knees, with a wolf-skin over his back, and Bertram's blunderbuss-pistol in his hand. He was creeping cautiously toward a herd of six or seven buffaloes that chanced to be feeding quietly there, quite unconscious of the near proximity of so dangerous an enemy.

"I hope the old pistol won't miss fire," whispered Redhand, as he observed that the wolf paused, evidently for the purpose of examining the priming.

"I hope," added Bounce, "that the Injun won't miss his aim. He be'nt used to pistols."

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"Never fear," said March, with a quiet grin. "If he aims within a yard o' the brute he's sure to hit, for I loaded the old blunderbuss myself, an' it's crammed nigh to the muzzle with all sorts o' things, includin' stones."

At this Big Waller stared, and said, emphatically, "It'll bust!" Bertram felt and looked uneasy, but Bounce shook his head.

"Them old things," said he, "never bust. I've been forty years, off an' on, in these parts, an' I've always obsarved that old irons o' that sort *don't* bust; cause why? they'd ha' busted w'en they wos new, if they'd bin goin' to bust at all. The fact is they *can't* bust. They're too useless even for that."

"How comes it," inquired Bertram, "that the buffaloes are not afraid of a wolf? I have been led to understand that wolves are the inveterate enemies of buffaloes, and that they often attack them."

To this question March, whose head was in close proximity to that of the artist, replied —

"Ay, the sneakin' brutes will attack a single wounded or worn-out old buffalo, when it falls behind the herd, and when there are lots o' their low-minded comrades along with 'em; but the buffaloes don't care a straw for a single wolf, as ye may see now if ye pay attention to what Hawkswing's doin'."

Bertram became silent on observing that the

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Indian had approached to within about pistol-range of the buffalo without attracting particular attention, and that he was in the act of taking aim at its shoulder. Immediately a sharp click caused the buffalo to look up and apprised the on-lookers that the faithless weapon had missed fire; again Hawkswing pulled the trigger and with a like result. By this time the buffalo, having become alarmed, started off at a run. Once more the click was heard; then the wolf, rising on its hind legs, coolly walked back to its comrades behind the bush, while the herd of buffaloes, galloped furiously away.

The Indian solemnly stalked up to Bertram and presented the pistol to him with such an expression of grave contempt on his countenance that March Marston burst into an irresistible fit of laughter; thereby relieving his own feelings and giving, as it were, direction to those of the others, most of whom were in the unpleasant condition of being undecided whether to laugh or cry.

To miss a buffalo was not indeed a new, or in ordinary circumstances, a severe misfortune; but to miss one after having been three days without food, with the exception of a little unpalatable wolf's flesh, was not an agreeable, much less an amusing, incident.

"I'll tell ye wot it is," said Bounce, slapping his thigh violently and emphasizing his words as if to imply that nobody had ever told anybody

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"wot" any thing "wos" since the world began up to that time, "I'll tell ye wot it is, I won't stand this sort o' thing no longer."

"It is most unfortunate," sighed poor Bertram, who thoroughly identified himself with his pistol, and felt much ashamed of it as if the fault had been his own.

"Wall, lads," observed Big Waller, drawing forth his pipe as the only source of comfort in these trying circumstances, and filling it with scrupulous care, "it ain't of no use gettin' grow-*ow*ly about it, I guess. There air more buffaloes then them wot's gone; mayhap we'll spliflicate one before we gits more waspisher."

It may, perhaps, be necessary to explain that Waller's last word referred to the unusually small waists of the party, the result of a pretty long fast.

"I'll tell ye what it is," said March, advancing toward Bounce with a swagger and drawing his hunting-knife, "I quite agree with Waller's sentiments. I don't mean to allow myself to get any more waspisher, so I vote that we cut Bounce up and have a feed. What say you, comrades?"

"All right," replied Bounce, laying bare his broad chest as if to receive the knife, "only, p'raps, ye'll allow me to eat the first slice off myself afore ye begin, cause I couldn't well have my share afterwards, d'ye see? But, now I think on't, I'd be rather a tough morsel. Young meat's

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gin'rally thought the tenderest. Wot say ye to cuttin' up March first, an' tryin' me nixt?"

"If you'll only wait, lads," said Redhand, "till Mr. Bertram gits a new flint into his pistol, we'll shoot the victim instead o' cuttin' him up. It'll be quicker, you know."

"Hah! non," cried Gibault, leaping a few inches off the ground, under the impulse of a new idea, "I vill show to you vat ve vill do. Ve vill each cot hoff von finger. Redhand, he vill begin vid de thomb, et so on till it come to me, and I vill cot hoff mine leet finger. Each vill devour the finger of de oder, an' so ve shall have von dinner vidout committing mordor — ha! vat say you?"

As Bertram had by this time arranged the lock of his pistol and reprimed it, the hungry travellers resumed their weary march without coming to a decision upon this delicate point.

It happened that, during the last few days, the land over which they travelled being somewhat barren, small game had become scarce, and the large game could not be approached near enough to be shot with such weapons as the artist's antiquated pistols; and as the party possessed nothing better in the shape of a projectile they had failed to procure supplies. They had now, however, again reached a rich country, and had succeeded in trapping a large wolf, under the skin of which Hawkswing had made, as we have

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seen, an unsuccessful effort to shoot a buffalo. Soon after this failure the party came to a ridge of gravelly soil that stretched across the plain like a wave.

The plain, or small prairie, to which we refer was in the midst of a most lovely scene. The earth was carpeted with rich green grass, in which the wild flowers nestled like gems. The ground was undulating, yet so varied in its formations that the waves and mounds did not prevent the eyes of the travellers ranging over a vast tract of country, even when they were down among the hollows; and, when they had ascended the backs of the ridges, they could cast a wide glance over a scene of mingled plain and wood, lake and river, such as is never seen except in earth's remotest wilds, where man has not attempted to adorn the face of Nature with the exuberances of his own wonderful invention.

Far away on the horizon the jagged forms and snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains rose clear and sharp against the sky. For some days past the trappers had sighted this stupendous "backbone" of the far west, yet so slowly did they draw near that March Marston and Bertram, in their impatience, almost believed they were a range of phantom hills, which ever receded from them as they advanced.

On reaching the summit of the gravelly ridge, Redhand looked along it with an earnest, searching gaze.

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"Wot's ado now?" inquired Bounce.

"There ought to be prairie-hens here," replied the other.

"Oh! do stand still, just as you are, men," cried Bertram, enthusiastically flopping down on a stone and drawing forth his sketch-book, "you'll make such a capital foreground."

The trappers smiled and took out their pipes, having now learned from experience that smoking was not detrimental to a sketch — rather the reverse.

"Cut away, Gibault, said Bounce, "an' take a look at the edge o' yon bluff o' poplars and willows. I've obsarved that prairie-hens is fond o' sich places. You'll not be missed out o' the pictur', bein' only a small objict, d'ye see, besides an ogly one."

The jovial Canadian acknowledged the compliment with a smile and obeyed the command, leaving his companions to smoke their pipes and gaze with quiet complacency upon the magnificent scene. Doubtless, much of their satisfaction resulted from the soothing influence of tobacco on their empty stomachs.

"I say," whispered Waller, removing his pipe and puffing from his lips a large cloud of smoke, which rolled upwards in the form of a white ring, "I say, Bounce, I guess it's past my comprehension what he means by a foreground. How does *we* make a capital foreground?"

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Bounce looked at his companion in silence for a few seconds; then he removed his pipe, pursed his lips, frowned heavily, looked at the ground, and repeated slowly, "How does *we* make a capital foreground?"

Waller nodded.

"Ay, that's it." Bounce resumed his pipe for a few seconds, and then said with an air of the utmost profundity,—

"Don't you know?"

"No, I don't."

"Wot? Nothin' about it wotiver?"

"Nothin' wotsomediver."

"Hm, that's okard," said Bounce, once more applying to his pipe; "'cause, d'ye see, it's most 'orrible difficult to explain a thing to a feller as don't know nothin' wotiver about it. If ye only had the smallest guess o'——"

"Wall, come, I does know *somethin'* about it," interrupted Waller.

"Wot's that?" inquired Bounce, brightening up.

"I calc'late that I knows for certain it ain't got no place wotever in my onderstandin'."

"Hah!" exclaimed Bounce. "Come, then, I'll do my best for to explain it t'ye. Here's wot it is. D'ye see Mr. Bertram, there?"

"Yes I does."

"An' d'ye see yerself?"

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"Wall, I does," replied Waller, looking complacently down at his huge limbs.

"Good; then d'ye see the ground over there?" continued Bounce, pointing with his pipe to the Rocky Mountains.

Waller nodded.

"Now then," said Bounce, in those deep earnest tones with which men usually attempt to probe the marrow of some desperately knotty question; "Now, then, when Mr. Bertram's a drawin' of, an' tries to look at the ground over there, you an' me comes *before* the ground, d'ye see; an' so we're, as ye may say, *before-grounds*. But men wot studies human natur' an' langwidges, d'ye see, comes for to know that words is always gittin onnecessary bits chopped off 'em — sometimes at one end, sometimes at t'other. So they tuck off the B, d'ye see, an' made it foreground, and that's how we come to be foregrounds."

"Oh!" said Waller, with the vacant air of a man who feels himself as wise at the termination as he was at the beginning of an explanation.

"Yes," resumed Bounce, "that's how it is. I must confess, for my part, that I don't 'xactly see the advantage o' us in that light. I should ha' thought it would ha' been better to make us stand to one side, d'ye see, and let him see how the land lies. But there's no accountin' for

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taste in this wurld — I've obsarved that iver since I was three fut two."

Having delivered himself of this graphic exposition of an abstruse subject, Bounce relapsed into silence, and the whole party continued for some minutes in a profound reverie. From this felicitous condition they were awakened by the sudden appearance of Black Gibault, who darted out of the poplar bluff and made toward them at the top of his speed. He uttered no cry, but, on coming near enough to permit of his features being clearly seen, it was observed that his eyes were eagerly wide open, and that his mouth was engaged in the formation of words. A second or two more, and he was near enough to be heard uttering the word "buffaloes" in a hoarse whisper.

"Ho! boy, wot is't?" cried Bounce, in an equally hoarse whisper.

"Ba — buffaloes, hah! buffaloes," cried Gibault, panting violently as he came up; "Where be de leet gun? Ho! Monsieur Bertram, out vid it."

"Where saw ye them?" asked Redhand, seizing the two pistols, and examining the priming.

"Jist oder side of de bluff. Ver' close to de bushes. Queek! queek! vite! mon garçon, you is so dreffful slow."

The latter part of this sentence was addressed to Hawkswing, who was quietly putting on his

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wolf-skin. Although too slow for the hasty spirit of Gibault, the Indian was quick enough for all useful purposes. In three minutes he was in the clump of poplar trees behind which the buffaloes were reported to be feeding, and in another minute he was out upon the plain creeping toward his victims, while the rest of the party were again huddled together behind a bush, looking on with deep interest and breathless attention.

Gradually and slowly the Indian crept toward the buffaloes, pausing and snuffing about from time to time as if he were a veritable wolf in search of something to eat. At last he had approached near enough to the herd to attract their attention, but scarcely near enough to make sure of bringing one down. The huge unwieldy creatures looked up inquiringly for a moment, but, seeing only a solitary enemy, they scorned to take further notice of him, and went on feeding.

Hawkswing paused within a few yards of the side of a fat sleek animal, and slowly raised his pistol. The trappers held their breath, and Bertram uttered a low groan of anxiety. One moment more and a white puff was followed by a loud crack and a bellow, as the horror-stricken buffaloes tossed up their heels and fled wildly from the spot, leaving one of their number in the agonies of death upon the plain.

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The knife of the Indian hastened the end, and with a rush and a yell of delight the whole party fell upon the luckless animal.

It was a wonderful sight to see, the way in which these experienced men flayed and cut up that buffalo! Hawkswing, without taking time to remove his wolf-skin covering, commenced upon the head and speedily cut out the tongue — a more difficult operation than inexperienced persons would suppose. Redhand and Bounce began at the shoulders, and Big Waller and Gibault fell to work upon the flanks. March Marston seized his axe, and hastening into the bluff felled a dead pine and kindled a fire. As for Bertram, he sat down to sketch the whole with a degree of prompt facility and gusto, that showed the habit had become second nature to him.

The way in which these men wielded their bloody knives, flayed and sliced, dismembered and divided that buffalo, is past belief — almost beyond description. Each man threw off his capote and tucked up his shirt-sleeves to the elbows, and very soon each had on a pair of bright red gauntlets. And the bloody appearance of Hawkswing's mouth proved that he had been anticipating the feast with a few tidbits raw. The others were more patient.

In very nearly as short a time as it takes to tell, the buffalo was converted into a mass of

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fragments that were powerfully suggestive of a butcher's shop, and the trappers adjourned to a neighboring rivulet to wash their hands and arms.

"Now, I'll tell ye wot it is," observed Bounce, while thus engaged; "I means for to have a most awful blow out, and then go to sleep for four-and-twenty hours on end."

"Ditto," remarked Big Waller with a nod; to which old Redhand replied with a chuckle.

"An' who be go to vatch, tink you?" inquired Gibault, as they all returned to the camp. "Prehaps de Injuns look out for us — vat den?"

"Ah, ye may well ask that, Gibault," said Redhand; "the fact is I've been thinkin' that now we're drawin' near to enemies we must begin to keep better watch at night, and to burn small fires o' dry wood, lest the smoke should tell a tale upon us."

"Oh, don't talk bam, old feller," said Waller; "I guess we'll have watchin' enough w'en we gits into the mountains. Let's take it easy here."

"We'll have one good blow out to-night, anyhow," cried March Marston, heaving a fresh pile of logs on the already roaring fire. "Now, Mr. Bertram, *do* give up your scratchin' to-night, and let's see what you can do in the eatin' way. I'm sure you've fasted long enough, at least for the good o' your health."

The poor artist had indeed fasted long enough

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to give to his naturally thin and lank figure a thread-papery appearance that might have suggested the idea that he was evaporating. He smiled good-humoredly when March Marston, who had now become rather familiar with him, shut up his sketch-book and set him forcibly down before the fire, all round which steaks and hunks of meat were roasting and grilling, and sending forth an odor that would have rendered less hungry men impatient of delay. But they had not to wait long. Each man sat before his respective steak or hunk, gazing eagerly, as, skewered on the end of a splinter of wood, his supper roasted hissingly. When the side next the fire was partially cooked, he turned it round and fell to work upon that while the other side was roasting — thus the cooking and the eating went on together.

After a considerable time symptoms of satiety began to appear, in the shape of an occasional remark. Soon Bounce uttered a deep sigh, and announced his belief that, having taken the edge off his appetite, it was time to begin with the marrow-bones. Thereupon, with the marrow-bones he began, and his example was quickly followed by his companions. There was a business-like steadiness of purpose in the way in which that meal was eaten, and in the whole of the procedure connected with it, that would have been highly diverting to a disinterested spectator.

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When the feast was concluded, the pipes made their appearance as a matter of course; and when these were lighted, and in full blast, the trappers found leisure to look round upon each other's faces with expressions of benignity.

"Dat be a monstrobolly goot supper," remarked Gibault Noir. Gibault spoke with an effort. It was quite plain that moderation was a virtue that he did not possess in a high degree — at least, not on the present occasion.

"You'll need a 'monstrobolly' good sleep arter it," observed Bounce, quietly.

"You will, jist," said Waller; "an' so will this coon, I cal——"

Big Waller was going to have "calculated," according to custom; but sleepiness overpowered him at the moment, and he terminated the word with a yawn of such ferocity that it drew from Redhand a remark of doubt as to whether his jaws could stand such treatment long.

Every member of that party seemed to be quite contented and amiable, but no one showed much inclination to talk, and ere many minutes had passed, half their number were under their blankets, their heads pillowed on their bundles and their eyes sealed in sleep. A few minutes later, and Big Waller, sinking into a very sprawling and reckless posture, with his back against the stem of a large cotton-tree, dropped into a state of slumber with his pipe hanging gracefully from his lips.

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This seemed so picturesque to Theodore Bertram, who sat immediately opposite to the Yankee, on the other side of the fire, that he pulled out his sketch-book and began enthusiastically to sketch by the flickering light. While he was thus occupied, the others lay down, one by one, and he was left, at last, the only waking member of the camp.

But Theodore Bertram was human, and this is tantamount to saying that he was not capable of ignoring the somnolent influences of human nature. To his own extreme surprise his head fell forward with an abrupt nod while he was engaged in the act of depicting Big Waller's nose, and he found, on resuming work with an imbecile smile at what he deemed his weakness, that that member of the Yankee's face was at least two feet long, and was formed after the pattern of a somewhat irregular Bologna sausage. India-rubber quickly put this to rights, however, and he set to again with renewed zeal. Throwing back his head, and looking up as if for inspiration, his wide-awake fell off, and it required a sudden and powerful effort to prevent his head and shoulders falling in the same direction.

Having replaced his hat and shaken himself a little, the persevering man once more applied himself to his task of finishing the Yankee's portrait, which, to say truth, now presented a variety of

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[illegible] that savored [illegible] Bertram had [illegible] the pencil [illegible] and the [illegible] himself on [illegible] observed that [illegible] leaned was in [illegible] The same [illegible] left side, [illegible] heavily [illegible] Waller and [illegible] cared not; [illegible] sleeping to mind [illegible]

[illegible] resumed his sit- [illegible] and was re- [illegible] as he [illegible] Waller's right eye [illegible] There [illegible] and he felt [illegible] of some [illegible] inspec- [illegible] drawn alto- [illegible] countenance, a [illegible] of the tree [illegible] changed the cur- [illegible] believe that he [illegible] impression he [illegible]

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Of course, Bertram recollected nothing after that; but when Gibault awoke next morning, he found him lying on his back, with his feet in the ashes of the extinct fire, his tall brigandish wide-awake perfectly flat beneath his shoulders, and his sketch-book lying open across his face.

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CHAPTER VIII.

A Cache discovered. — Bertram becomes valorous. — Failure follows, and a brief Skirmish, Flight, and Separation are the Results.

THE sun was high, scattering the golden clouds in the bright sky, gilding the hill-tops, flooding the plains, vivifying vegetable life, and gladdening the whole animal creation, when on the following morning, our wearied trappers raised their heads and began to think of breakfast.

To do these trappers justice, however, we must add that their looks, when they became wide enough awake to take full cognizance of the scenery, indicated the presence of thoughts and emotions of a more elevated character, though, from the nature of their training from infancy, they wanted words to express their feelings.

It was otherwise with Bertram and March Marston. Their exclamations, the instant they arose, showed that both their hearts were keenly alive to the good and the beautiful which surrounded them — and their tongues were not altogether incapable of uttering the praise of Him who clothes so gorgeously the lovely earth and peoples it with millions of happy creatures —

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yes, happy creatures, for, despite the existence of death, and sin, and sorrow everywhere, and the croaking of misanthropes, there *is* much, very much, of pure, overflowing happiness here below.

"Come, March — Mr. Bertram, time presses," said Redhand, interrupting the two friends in the midst of an earnest conversation; "we've got a long day before us, and, mayhap, a fight with redskins at the end o't, so it behoves us to make a good breakfast and set off as soon as we can. We're late enough already."

"Ah, Redhand!" exclaimed March, "you're a terrible fellow for duty an' business, an' all that sort o' thing. It's always 'time to be off,' or 'time to think o' this or that,' or 'we mustn't put off,' with you. Why won't ye let us take a breathin' spell once in a way to enjoy ourselves, eh?"

The old man pointed to the sun — "You've enjoyed yourself late enough to-day, han't ye?"

"Come, March, you're in a fault-finding humor this morning," said Bertram, as they walked toward the camp. "Let's enjoy ourselves in spite of circumstances. Do you know, I hold it to be exceedingly wise as well as philosophical, to make the best of things at all times."

"Do you?" exclaimed March, in a tone of affected surprise; "now that's odd. You must

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be a real clever fellow to have made up your mind on that point. But somehow or other I'm inclined to think that most o' the trappers hereabouts are as wise as yourself on it, though, mayhap, they don't say it just in the same words. There's Waller, now, as 'll tell ye that when he 'can't help it, he guesses he'll jist grin an' bear it.' And there's an old Irish trapper that's bin in the mountains nigh forty years now, an' who's alive at this day — if he beant dead — that used to say to himself when ill luck came upon him — 'Now, Terence, be aisy, boy, an' av ye can't be aisy, be as aisy as ye can.' So you see, Mr. Bertram, we have got a few sparks of wisdom in these diggin's."

"Now, then, stop yer feelosophy," cried Bounce, hitching his shoulders so as to induce his light load to take up a more accommodating position. "Ye didn't use to be a slow feller, March; wot's to do? Ye ain't a goin' to cave in 'cause we're gettin' nigh the redskins, are ye?"

To this March deigned no reply, but, swinging his bundle over his shoulder, set off at a pace that speedily left his laughing comrades far behind. When, in the course of an hour after, they overtook him, he was discovered lying flat on his back, with his head resting on his bundle, and smoking his pipe with an air of perfect satisfaction.

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During the course of that day the trappers walked about thirty miles. Toward the afternoon they came to a large river, along the banks of which they pursued their way, led by Redhand, who seemed as familiar with the country as if he had dwelt there from infancy. The old trapper's kindly visage was lighted up with a smile of recognition, ever and anon, when some new and striking feature of the landscape opened up to view, as if he had met with and were greeting some personal friend. He spoke occasionally in a low tone to March, who kept usually close to his side, and pointed to spots which were associated in his memory with adventures of various kinds. But Redhand's observations were few. He preferred to listen to the conversation of his comrades, as they plodded steadily along, enlivening their march with many an anecdote and legend.

At last Redhand called a halt, and gazed inquiringly around him, as if in search of some object.

"Wot's up?" inquired Bounce, earnestly.

"It was hereabouts, somewhere," muttered Redhand, to himself rather than to his friend, then added quickly, as he threw down his pack, "Ay, there it is — never touched. Now that's what I call luck."

"*Wot's* luck?" inquired Waller.

"Ah, dat is de keevestion," added Gibault, with a look of surprise.

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"You must know, lads," said Redhand, turning to his comrades, who observed his movements with considerable astonishment; you must know, lads, there was an old chap who once trapped beavers up in them parts——"

"Oh! it's a hanikdot," interrupted Big Waller; "then I guess we'd as well sot down." So saying, he seated himself on his bundle and, as a matter of course, proceeded to fill his pipe. The others followed his example, with the exception of Redhand, who remained standing, and of Bertram, who quickly opened his sketch-book, that being the first opportunity he had enjoyed during the day of making an entry therein.

"Right," exclaimed Bounce. "It's allers more feelosophical to sot than to stand — also more ekornomical, 'cause it saves yer moccasins. Go on with yer story, old man."

"It ain't a story," said Redhand; "nor I don't think it can even be called an anecdote. Well, this old chap that once trapped beaver in them parts came down to Pine Point settlement one year with a load o' furs, sold 'em all off, took a ragin' fever, and died." Redhand paused, and gazed dreamily at the ground.

"I say," observed Bounce, seriously, "ain't that wot ye may call raither a short hanikdot — not much in it, eh?"

"But before he died," resumed Redhand, without noticing the interruption, "he sent for me an'

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said — Redhand, I'm goin' onder, an' I've got some property as I don't want lost. Ye know Beaver Creek?' 'Yes,' says I, 'every fut of it.' 'Well, then,' says he, 'there's a spot there with three mounds on the right side o' the Creek, and a tall poplar in front of 'em.' 'I know it,' says I. 'Well, w'en I last come from that part,' says he, 'I made a *cache* at the foot o' that poplar, an' put one or two things in, which it 'ud be a pity to lose — so I give 'em to you, Redhand. I was chased by Injuns at the place, so I couldn't stop to bring 'em away, d'ye see?' 'An' what were the things ye put there?' said I. But he gave me no answer; his mind began to wander, and he never spoke sense again. Now, lads, this is Beaver Creek, and there stands the poplar in front o' the three mounds."

Redhand pointed to the tree as he spoke, and the others started up with alacrity, for the little touch of romance connected with the incident, combined with their comparatively destitute condition, and their ignorance of what the concealed treasure might be, powerfully stirred their curiosity.

Arming themselves with strong staves, they began to dig away the earth at the roots of the poplar.

After a few minutes' hard work, Bounce rose to wipe the perspiration from his brow, and said, —

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"Wot for didn't ye tell us o' this before, Redhand?"

"Because I wasn't sure the *cache* might not have bin discovered long ago, and I didn't want to risk disappointin' ye."

"Hallo! here's *somethin'*," exclaimed Big Waller, as the point of the stake with which he tore up the earth struck against some hard substance.

"Have a care, boy," cried Bounce, stooping down and clearing away the earth with his hands. "P'raps it's easy broken. No — why — it's a keg!"

"So it am," cried Gibault; p'raps it am poudre."

At this moment Big Waller and Bounce gave the keg a violent tug and disentombed it, an operation which proved Gibault's surmise to be wrong, for the shake showed that the contents were liquid. In a moment the plug was driven in, and Bounce, putting his nose to the hole, inhaled the result. He drew back with a look of surprise, and said —

"Brandy!"

"Ha! here's one oder ting," cried Gibault, laying hold of a bundle and dragging it to light. "Vat can dis be."

The question was soon answered; the string was cut, the leathern cover unrolled, and a considerable quantity of tobacco was disclosed to the view of the trappers, whose looks showed

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pretty clearly that this latter discovery was much more agreeable than the former.

After digging deep all round the tree, they came to the conclusion that this was all that the *cache* contained.

"Now," said Bounce, after some talk in reference to their newly-found treasure, "wot's to be done with dis here keg o' brandy? As for the baccy, we'll carry that along with us, of course, an' if Master Redhand's a liberal feller, we'll help him to smoke it. But the brandy keg's heavy, an' to say truth, I'm not much inclined for it. I never wos fond o' fire-water."

"If you'll allow me, friends, to suggest," said Bertram, whose experience among trappers in other regions had convinced him that spirits was a most undesirable commodity; "I would recommend that you should throw this brandy away. I never saw good come of it. We do not require it for health, neither do we for sickness. Let us throw it away, my friends; it's a dangerous and deceitful foe."

"Mais, monsieur," interposed Gibault, with a rueful countenance; you speak the trooth; but though hims be dangereaux an' ver' bad for drink oftin, yet ven it be cold vedder, it *doo* varm de cokils of de hart!"

Big Waller laughed vociferously at this. "I guess Gibault's right," said he, "it 'ud be a powerful shame to fling it away."

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"Well, lads, said Redhand, "it's evident that we can't drink it just now, for it would unsteady our hands for the work we have to do this night. It's also clear we can't carry it with us on a war expedition; so I propose that we should put it where we found it an' come back for it when we've done wi' the redskins."

This plan was finally agreed to; the keg was reburied at the foot of the poplar, and the party continued their journey, carrying the much-prized tobacco along with them.

The sun was still blazing above the mountains in the west, tinging their snowy spires with rosy red, when the trappers came upon the first indication of the neighborhood of Indians in the shape of recent footprints and cuttings in the woods. A large canoe was also found lying bottom up on the bank of the creek. This Redhand examined, and found it to be in good condition, although, from the marks in the vicinity, it was evident that it had not been recently used.

Men who spend their lives in the backwoods of America are celebrated for the closeness with which they observe every object and circumstance which happens to pass within the range of their perceptions. This habit and acuteness of observation is the result of necessity. The trapper and the Red Indian are alike dependent very much on this faculty for their sustenance

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THE DRUNKEN BRAWL

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and for their safety. Surrounded as they are by perils of every kind, their eyes and ears are constantly on the alert, as they pass through the pathless wilderness on the hunt or on the war-trail. No object within the range of vision is passed with indifference. Every thing is carefully yet quickly noted — the breaking of a twig, the crushing of a blade of grass, or the footprint of man or beast. Hence the backwoodsman acquires the habit of turning all things in his path to account, or notes them in case they should, by any possibility, be required by him at a future time.

Redhand had no definite object in view when, with the assistance of March Marston, he lifted the canoe and placed it in the stream to ascertain that it was water-tight, and then replaced it on the bank with the paddles close beside it. But he had a general idea, founded on experience, that a good canoe was a useful thing in many supposable circumstances, and that it was as well to know where such an article was to be found.

"We shall have to go cautiously now," said he, before resuming the march. "The Injuns are not far off, as ye may see by yonder thin line o' smoke that rises above the trees on the mountain side. If they are the men we seek, they're sharp as foxes, so we'll have to step like the painter."

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Bertram looked up quickly at the last word — then he smiled the next moment as he remembered that the panther was thus styled by trappers.

Proceeding cautiously forward in single file, they at length gained a spot beyond which they could not advance without running the risk of being discovered. Here another halt was made, and here it was agreed that Redhand should advance alone, near enough to ascertain whether the Indians, whose camp they were approaching, were actually the scamps who had robbed Bertram of his horses. The old trapper was about to set forward when Bertram stopped him.

"Methinks, old man," said he, "it were well that I should accompany you on this expedition, which I foresee is one of no little danger; and as the danger is encountered chiefly on my account, it seems to me right and fitting that I should share it along with you. Besides, two are better than one in a struggle, whether mental or physical."

Redhand looked a little perplexed. He did not like to tell the poor artist that he was totally unfit to make a stealthy approach to an Indian camp, yet he felt that the danger of failure would be increased tenfold if he allowed him to make the attempt; but Bertram pleaded so earnestly, and, withal, so resolutely, that he at length consented, on condition of his doing nothing but

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what he was desired to do, and keeping as quiet as a mouse. This the artist promised to do, and the two accordingly set forth, armed with their knives and the two pistols. Bertram also carried his sword. The rest of the party were to remain in ambush until the return of the others.

During the first part of their advance through the wood Bertram trod as softly and carefully as an Indian, and watched every motion of his companion, who led him down into a ravine which conducted them to within a few hundred yards of the camp. From the absence of such noises as the barking of dogs and shouts of children, the old trapper conjectured that this must be either a party of trappers or a war party of Indians. A few minutes' creeping on hands and knees through the underwood brought them to a spot whence the camp could be seen, and showed that in the latter conjecture he was right. The red warriors, forty in number, were seated in a circle round their watch fire smoking their tomahawks in moody silence.

To the eye of Bertram they all seemed to be lost in dreamy reverie, but Redhand observed, with a feeling of anxiety, that he who seemed to be their chief sat in that peculiar attitude which indicates intense attention. Laying his hand on Bertram's shoulder, the old man said, in the faintest possible whisper—

"Yonder sits the thief, an't he?"

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Bertram at once recognized in the chief of the band before him Big Snake, the Indian who had stolen his horses and property; so he nodded his head violently, and looked excited, but wisely refrained from speech, lest his voice should be overheard.

Redhand shook his head. "The thief," said he, in a tone that was scarcely audible, "has heard us: I see by his face that he suspects he has heard *something*, and he knows that it was not the falling of a leaf. If we break a twig now we're done for."

Redhand meant this to be a salutary caution to his companion, which would insure a noiseless retreat. To men of his own stamp it would have been useful, but he little knew the peculiar temperament of his friend; the mere idea of the success of the whole expedition depending upon his extreme care, unhinged the nerves of the poor artist, who, although absolutely a brave man, in the true sense of the term, could no more control his nervous system than he could perform an Indian war-dance. He could have rushed single-handed on the whole body of warriors with ease, but he could not creep among the dry twigs that strewed the ground without trembling like an aspen-leaf lest he should break one.

It is wonderful, however, what necessity will enable men to do. Bertram did creep after his friend, back toward the spot where the rest of

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his party lay, as softly and noiselessly as if he had been bred to the work from infancy. On regaining the edge of the ravine, they rose and advanced in a crouching posture. Then Bertram sighed and felt that imminent danger was over. Alas! that feeling of partial security cost him dear. The step that succeeded the sigh was a careless one. His foot caught in a projecting root, and next moment he went headforemost into the centre of a decayed bush with a crackling crash that was absolutely appalling in the circumstances.

Redhand cast upon the luckless man one glance of horror, and uttering the words, "Run for your life!" dashed down the bank, and coursed along the bottom like a hare. At the same moment that terrific yell, which has so often chilled the heart's blood of men and women in those western wilds, rang through the forest, telling that they were discovered, and that the Indians were in pursuit.

Bertram kept close to the heels of the old trapper at first, but before he had run fifty yards he tripped and fell again. On attempting to rise he was seized and thrown violently to the ground by an Indian warrior. Looking back and observing this, Redhand turned at once, like a hare doubling on its course, and rushed to the rescue; but before he reached his friend he was surrounded by a dozen yelling Indians. At the foremost of these he levelled his pistol, but the faithless weapon

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missed fire, and he was in the act of hurling it at his adversary, when a blow from behind felled him to the ground.

While this was going on, the trappers were bounding to the succor of their comrades. When they came to the field of action and saw neither of their friends (for they had been borne swiftly away), and beheld an overwhelming band of armed savages rushing toward them, they at once perceived that strength or courage could avail them nothing in such an unequal conflict; so they turned and fled, scattering themselves among the bushes so as to divert pursuit as much as possible.

Bounce and Gibault were the only two who kept together. These made for the spot where the canoe had been left, but the latter outran the former so quickly that he was soon lost to view ahead of him. In a few minutes Bounce gained the bank of the stream, and seized the end of the canoe. To his amazement Gibault was nowhere to be seen. But he had no time for thought, for at that moment he was discovered by two Indians who ran toward him. The canoe was launched, and a paddle seized in an instant, but the trusty trapper was loath, even in his extremity, to push off while his comrade might be in danger.

"Ho! Gibault! Gibault Noir;" he shouted. "Quick, lad; yer too late o'most, ho!"

Grinding his teeth in an agony of anxiety, he

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made a sudden rush at the foremost Indian, who little dreamed of such an attack, and hit him with the paddle with all his force. The savage dropped like a stone, and the paddle flew into a dozen splinters. This was a foolish act on the part of Bounce, for the second Indian was now close upon him, and, seeing the fate of his companion, he stopped short, and hastily fitted an arrow to his bow. Just then several of the savages burst from the wood with fierce cries. There was no time to lose. Bounce turned, pushed off the canoe, and leaped in as an arrow grazed his neck.

The bold trapper's condition seemed hopeless; for, having broken the paddle to pieces, he could not propel his little bark out of danger. The stream was broad and rapid at that place, and swept him away swiftly. Immediately a shower of arrows fell around him, some grazing his person and piercing his clothes and the canoe, but fortunately not wounding him.

Meanwhile three of the Indians darted down stream, and, throwing themselves into the current, swam out so as to intercept the canoe as it passed. Bounce, having laid down at full length in the bottom of his tiny bark to avoid the arrows which were discharged at him, did not observe these men, and the first intimation he had of what was taking place was the canoe being nearly upset, as a powerful savage laid hold of the side of it.

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To draw his knife and pass it round the wrist of the Indian, so as to sever the tendons, was the work of a moment. The savage fell back with a yell of mingled rage and pain. The others seeing what had occurred, wisely turned and made for the shore. This incident was the means of saving the trapper, for the Indians, fearful of wounding their comrade, had ceased to discharge their arrows, and when they again ventured to do so, a tumultuous rapid had caught the canoe, and whirled it nearly over to the opposite shore.

Bounce watched his opportunity. As he swept near to a rocky point, he sprang toward it with all his might. He fell short, but happily the water did not reach above his knees. Next moment he sprang up the bank and stood on the edge of the underwood, where he paused, and, turning round, shook his clenched fist at his enemies, and uttered a shout of defiance.

The disappointed Indians gave vent to a fiendish howl, and discharged a cloud of arrows, most of which fell short of their mark. Ere the last shaft had fallen harmless to the ground, Bounce had entered the forest and was gone.

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CHAPTER IX.

Bounce cogitates upon the embarrassing Circumstances of his Condition. — Discovery of Black Gibault — Terrible Fate in Store for their Comrades. — A Mode of Rescue planned. — Dreadful Effects of Fire-water. — The Rescue.

ABOUT ten minutes after making his escape from his Indian foes, Bounce seated himself on the trunk of a fallen tree and began to think upon "Number One."

A little red squirrel had been seated on the trunk of that tree just two minutes before his arrival. It was now seated on the topmost branch of a neighboring pine, looking at the unceremonious intruder, with a pair of brilliant black eyes, indignantly.

Possibly the reader may think that it was selfish of Bounce, at such a time, to devote much attention to Number One. He had just escaped; he was in comparative safety; he was free; while here could be little or no doubt that his late companions were prisoners, if not killed, and that, in the ordinary course of things, they would eventually suffer death by torture. At such a time and in such circumstances it would be more natural, even in a selfish man, to think of

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any or of all the other numerals than number one.

But, reader, I need scarcely tell you that things are not always what they seem. Men are frequently not so bad as, at a first glance, they would appear to be.

Bounce always reasoned philosophically, and he often thought aloud. He did so on this occasion, to the immense edification of the little red squirrel, no doubt. At least, if we may judge from the way in which it glared and stared at the trapper — peeped at him round the trunk of the tree, and over the branches and under the twigs and through the leaves, jerking its body and quirking its head and whisking its tail — we have every reason to conclude that it experienced very deep interest and intense excitement. Pleasure and excitement being, with many people, convertible terms, we have no reason for supposing that it is otherwise with squirrels, and, therefore, every reason for concluding that the squirrel in question enjoyed Bounce's visit greatly.

"Now this is wot it comes to," said Bounce, calmly filling his pipe, from the mere force of habit, for he had not at that time the most distant idea of enjoying a smoke. "This is wot it comes to. Savages is savages all the wurld over, and they always wos savages, an' they always will be savages, an' they can't be nothin' else."

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At this point Bounce recollected having seen an Indian missionary who had been taken when a boy from his father's wigwam and educated and who had turned out as good and respectable a Christian gentleman as most white men, and better than many, so he checked himself and said: —

"Leastwise they can't be nothin' but savages so — so long as they *is* savages."

This argument, although exceedingly obvious, seemed even to his own mind to possess so little power, that he endeavored to enforce it by slapping his thigh with such energy that the body of the red squirrel nearly jumped out at its own eyes. It clasped the tree-stem to its beating heart bravely, however, and, judging from its subsequent conduct, speedily recovered its self-possession.

"That's how it is," continued Bounce; "an' that bein' the case, savages always invariably thinks o' number one, before they thinks on nothin' else. Now, as men judge theirselves so they judges of others — that's a fact, as all feelosophy has preclaimed, an' all experience has pruven. Wot then? Why, them savages 'll think I've cleared off — made tracks — thankful to git away with my own skin whole, and carin' no more for my comrades than if they wos so many stumps. Thinkin' that, of coorse they'll think it's o' no use to try to cross the river and give

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chase, cause I've got a long start o' em, an' so, d'ye see, they'll give me up an' think no more about me. Good! very good! But p'raps it's jest poss'ble that feller whose paw I tickled *may* sometimes recall me to mind."

This last idea tickled the trapper so powerfully that he chuckled in a quiet way, and in doing so exposed such a double row of white teeth that the squirrel, which had remained for some time in an attitude of deep attention, began to show symptoms of uneasiness.

"Now, I'll tell you wot I'll do," continued Bounce, resuming his look of grave anxiety, as the thought of his comrades recurred to him; "I'll go up the river till I comes to opposite the place where I shoved the canoe into the water. By the time I git there it'll be dark; then I'll swum across an' foller the redskins an' save my comrades if I can. If I can't, wot then? why I'll leave the scalp of Bob Ounce to dangle in the smoke of a redskin's wigwam."

We have elsewhere hinted that when a Rocky-Mountain trapper makes up his mind to do a certain thing he usually does it at once. Having settled the plan of his future proceedings, Bounce did not waste more time in thought or speech. He thrust his unsmoked pipe into his bosom, leaped up from the trunk of the fallen tree, and darted from the spot with such sudden promptitude, that the horrified squirrel sprang wildly

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into empty space and vanished from the scene forever!

For a quarter of an hour Bounce glided noiselessly through the forest, keeping a course parallel with the river. In the deepening gloom of evening, he appeared more like a spectre than a human being — so quick and agile were his motions as he flitted past the tree-stems, yet so noiseless the tread of his moccasined feet. The bushes were thick and in places tangled, compelling him to stoop and twist and diverge right and left as he sped along, but, being unencumbered with weapons or weight of any kind, he advanced so rapidly that in the short space of time we have mentioned he stood opposite to that part of the bank where the attack had been made, and below which he had been swept for a great distance in the canoe by the rapid stream.

Here he spent some time in reconnoitring the opposite bank, but without gathering much information from his observations. No symptom of the presence of human beings could be discovered. No column of smoke rising above the trees to tell of the watch-fire of white man or red. The trapper listened intently, then he bethought him, for the first time, of giving the signal which, at setting out on their journey, they had agreed to use in all circumstances of danger. It was the low howl of a wolf followed immediately by the hoot of an owl. The re-

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ply to it was to be the hoot of the owl without the cry of the wolf when danger should be imminent and extreme caution necessary, or the howl of the wolf alone if the danger should have passed away.

To the first utterance of the signal no reply was made. After waiting a few seconds, Bounce gave it forth again. Immediately after, the low howl of a wolf was heard on the opposite bank, and a figure appeared at the edge of the river. Darkness prevented the trapper ascertaining who it was, but a repetition of the cry convinced him that it could be none other than Black Gibault.

With a grunt of satisfaction, Bounce at once proceeded to make preparations for crossing the river. Cutting a large piece of bark from a neighboring tree, he hastily formed it into a species of dish or flat boat; then, stripping off all his garments, he tied them up in a tight bundle, and placed them in this miniature canoe; after which he plunged boldly into the stream and made for the opposite shore, pushing his little ark before him. In five minutes he had crossed, and entered into a hasty conversation with Gibault, in low, eager tones, while pulling on his clothes.

"First of all, lad," said Bounce, laying his hand impressively on the other's shoulder, "are they all safe? — none killed?"

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"Non; dey be all alive, for certain."

"I'm thankful for that — *very* thankful. Now go ahead, lad, and tell me what ye know, while I pull on my leggins."

"Vell, dey be alive, as I have say. Mais dey not live long."

Gibault said this with such a look of woe-begone despair that Bounce paused in the midst of his dressing and said with much anxiety — "Wot's wrong! — why not, lad?"

"'Cause dey vill be tortured to death demain, or de day après de morrow. Stay, I vill tell to you all I knows. You mus' know, ven I run avay from you, I do so 'cause I know dat canoe ver' probabilie git opturnéd, so I come to river bank before every von. Dere is von big tree dere, so op I go like von skvirrel. You know vat come to pass après dat. You smash de head of de Injun, aussi, you smash de paddil. Den you escape, an' de Injuns howl vid passion!

Ver' soon after dat, dey all come to de bank of river — forty of 'em, I tink — draggin' our comerades vid dem, all tied by de wrist — Red-hand, an' Big Valler, an' March, an' Hawksving, an' poor Monsieur Bertram. Mais, dat Monsieur Bertram, be most 'straordinary man! He terrible-ment frightenéd for every leetil ting, but him not fright von bit for big ting! Hims look at de sauvage dat hold him as if him be a lion. I do

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tink Monsieur Bertram would fight vell if hims obleeged.

"After good deal of consultoration an' disputerin', dey vas about for go avay; so I sit ver' still, but I move my foot von leet' morsil, an' von small leef fall to de ground. It vas ver' small leaf, but Hawksving him see it. Ah! he be von cliver Injun. Ver' sharp in sight too! I tink him should be named Hawks*eye*. No von else notice it, but I see Hawksving visper to Big Valler. Dat man be sharp feller too. He turns hims back to de tree, nevair vonce looked up, but him burst into loud laugh, like von tondre-clap, an' cry out, 'Vell done, Gibault! Keep close, old feller; their village is one day off toward de sun!' An' den he laugh again. Ah! ho! how my heart him jomp ven he speak my name! But de Injuns tink hims yell out to some von cross de river, for him look dat vay. Vell, off dey go, and I begin to breath more easy; but ven dey git far off, I hear the voice of Big Valler come back like far-avay tondre, cryin' 'Dey're goin' to roast us alive to-morrow; look sharp!' Dat vas de last I hear. Den de darkness come, an' den you come, an', now, vat is to come nixt?"

Poor Gibault spoke fast, and perspired very much, and looked wild and haggard, for his nature was sensitive and sympathetic, and the idea of his comrades meeting with such a horrible fate was almost too much for him.

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Bounce's honest face assumed an expression of deep anxiety, for, fertile though his resources usually were, he could not at that moment conceive how it was possible for two unarmed men, either by force or stratagem, to rescue five comrades who were securely bound, and guarded by forty armed warriors, all of whom were trained from infancy in the midst of alarms that made caution and intense watchfulness second nature to them.

"It looks bad," said Bounce, sitting down on a stone, clasping his hard hands together, and resting an elbow on each knee. "Sit ye down, Gibault. We'll think a bit, an' then go to work. That's wot we'll do — d'ye see?"

"Non, I don't see," groaned Gibault. "Vat can ve do? Two to forty! If it was only swords ve had to fight vid — Hah! But alas; we have noting — dey have every ting."

"True, lad, force won't do," returned Bounce; "an' yit," he added, knitting his brows, "if nothin' else 'll do, we'll try at least *how much* force 'll do."

After a short pause, Bounce resumed, — "Wos they tied very tight, Gibault?"

"Oui. I see de cords deep in de wrists, an' poor Redhand seem to be ver' moch stunned; he valk as if hims be dronk.

"Drunk!" exclaimed Bounce, suddenly springing up as if he had received an electric shock,

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and seizing his companion by both shoulders, while, for a moment, he gazed eagerly into his eyes; then pushing him violently away, he turned round and darted along the bank of the river, crying, as he went, "Come along, Gibault, I'll tell ye wot's up as we go!"

The astonished Canadian followed as fast as he could, and, in an exclamatory interjectional sort of way, his friend explained the plan of rescue which he had suddenly conceived, and which was as follows:—

First he proposed to go back to the *cache* at the foot of the tall tree, and dig up the keg of brandy, with which he resolved to proceed to the camp of the Indians, and by some means or other, get the whole clan to drink until they should become intoxicated. Once in this condition, he felt assured they could be easily circumvented.

Gibault grasped at this wild plan as a drowning man is said to grasp at a straw, and lent his aid right willingly to disentomb and carry the brandy-keg. Neither he nor Bounce knew whether there was enough brandy to intoxicate the whole tribe, but they had no time to inquire minutely into probabilities.

Vigorously, perseveringly, without rest or halt, did these two trappers pursue their way that night, with the keg slung on a pole between them. The stars glimmered down through the trees upon

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their path, as if they wished them success in their enterprise. It was all-important that they should reach the Indian camp before day-break; so, although footsore and weary from their late exertion after a long day's march, they nevertheless ran steadily on at a long swinging trot, which brought them, to their inexpressible joy, much sooner than they had anticipated, to their journey's end.

It was two hours before dawn when they came suddenly upon the camp, — so suddenly that they had to crouch the instant they saw the watch-fires, in order to avoid being discovered.

"Now, Gibault," whispered Bounce, "you'll have to remain here. Get into a hiding-place as fast as ye can, and keep close. You're clever enough to know what to do, and when to do it. Only, lad, come near and have your knife handy when the row is at the loudest, and see that ye don't let the squaws cut out our livers when we're tied up."

Gibault nodded significantly.

"It's a curious fact," continued Bounce, in a somewhat sad tone, "that I'm more afraid o' the squaws than o' the men. Hows'ever, it's got to be done!"

So saying, Bounce shouldered the keg, and, shaking his comrade by the hand, as if he felt that he might be parting with him forever, he glided into the darkness of the forest, leaving

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Gibault to secrete himself on the side of a mound, from which he could witness all that went on in the camp.

From this point of observation the poor Canadian beheld what was not calculated to allay his fears. The camp lay in a hollow, surrounded by trees. On an open space were erected several leathern huts or tents, in the midst of which blazed a large camp fire. Round this the forty warriors were seated, eating their supper, while a number of squaws were sitting in the entrances to their tents variously engaged. Horses hobbled — that is, with the fore-feet tied together to prevent their running away — were cropping the grass close to the tents. Not far from them, and within the circle of light cast around by the fire, stood a group of small trees. To each of these was tied a man, and Gibault had no difficulty in making them out to be his unfortunate comrades.

Occasionally, as he gazed, one or two of the old Indian women went up to these helpless men, with a yell of execration, and, brandishing scalping-knives before their faces, appeared as if about to plunge them into their hearts; but their time had not yet come; the hags were only anticipating the feast of butchery that awaited them on the morrow."

While Gibault was gazing at this scene with mingled feelings of anxiety, rage, and horror, the

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whole band of Indians suddenly sprang to their feet and seized their weapons. Almost at the same moment Bounce strode into the circle of light and deposited his cask on the ground. Then, making signs of peace, he advanced toward one of the Indians, who, from his dress and appearance, seemed to be the chief, and presented him with a piece of tobacco. The chief accepted the gift in silence.

Bounce, who was well acquainted with many of the dialects of that region, had no difficulty in making himself understood. He stated that he was a trapper, that he had come to that country to trade, and asked whether his Indian friends had furs to dispose of. As he had anticipated, the savages were in no mood to treat with a solitary man who was entirely in their power. The chief, who evidently suspected that he was a friend of the prisoners, instead of replying, asked him sarcastically what he had in the keg.

"Fire-water," replied Bounce, unhesitatingly.

At this the eyes of the savages sparkled with delight. Not deigning to waste more time with him, they seized the unfortunate trapper, and confronted him with his companions, gazing earnestly in their faces the while to observe whether they betrayed any sign of recognition.

It said much for the self-control of these hardy men, that, although their comrade was thus suddenly and unexpectedly placed before them, they

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did not permit a muscle of their countenances to change, but gazed on him and on his captors with that expression of defiant contempt with which Indians usually meet their fate, and in which they are equalled, sometimes even outdone, by the unfortunate white trappers who chance to fall into their cruel hands.

And well was it, for the success of the scheme, that Theodore Bertram's nerves had received such repeated and powerful shocks that day, that they were now incapable of feeling. He had been so terribly and repeatedly struck with amazement that his features had assumed a settled expression of surprise that could not be increased, so that when he beheld Bounce a prisoner before him, although he certainly felt astonishment, he could by no means increase the expression of that sensation. The Indians, therefore, passed away from him with a howl of derision, and tied Bounce to a tree beside his comrades, concluding that, instead of a plotter, they had, in him, made another lucky capture. Anxiety to taste their beloved beverage had something to do with their haste in this matter, no doubt.

No one who has not seen it can conceive of the intense passion the North American Indian has for ardent spirits. He seems to have no power of restraint whatever when the opportunity of indulging that passion presents itself.

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The head of the keg was quickly knocked in, and the eyes of the savages seemed positively to flash as they gazed upon the precious fluid. The chief advanced first with a little tin mug, such as was sold to them by traders, and drank a deep draught; he then handed the cup to another, but the impatience of the others could not be restrained; they crowded round with their mugs, and dipping them into the keg, drank eagerly, while the squaws, who loved the fire-water as much as did their masters, formed an outer circle, and, as patiently as they could, awaited their turn. They knew full well that it would soon come.

The Indians, being unaccustomed to frequent potations, were quickly maddened by the spirit, which mounted to their brains and rushed through their veins like wild-fire, causing every nerve in their strong frames to tingle. Their characteristic gravity and decorum vanished. They laughed, they danced, they sang, they yelled, like a troop of incarnate fiends! Then they rushed in a body toward their prisoners, and began a species of war-dance round them, flourishing their tomahawks and knives close to their faces as if they were about to slay them; shrieking and howling in the most unearthly manner, and using all those cruel devices that are practised by Red Indians to terrify those unfortunates whom they intend ultimately to kill.

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Suddenly one of the warriors observed that the squaws were stealthily approaching the spirit-keg, and rushed toward them with a howl of fury, followed by his comrades, who drove the women away and recommenced drinking. And now a fiercer spirit seemed to seize upon the savages; old feuds and jealousies, that had long been cherished in silence, broke irresistibly forth. Angry words and fierce looks were followed by the drawing of knives. Suddenly a young man rushed upon a comrade and buried his knife in his heart. The piercing death-cry was followed by the vengeful yell of the relatives of the murdered man, as they sprang upon the murderer. Others flew to the rescue, and the drunken *mêlée* became general. Blood began to flow freely, and there is no doubt that many lives would have been sacrificed had not the combatants been too much intoxicated to fight with vigor. Many of them fell prostrate and helpless on attempting to rise. Others dealt their blows at random, staggering and falling one upon another, until they lay in a heap, shrieking, biting, tearing, and stabbing — a bloody struggling mass, which told more eloquently than tongue can tell, that, deep and low though savage human nature has fallen in sin and misery, there is a depth profounder still, to which even those who seem to be the lowest may be precipitated by the fatal power of strong drink.

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And now Gibault Noir felt that it was time for him to draw near to the horrible scene, in order to be ready, when the moment should arrive, to release the prisoners, or to protect them in the event of any of the drunken crew being tempted to a premature slaughter.

The women were now actively interfering to prevent further bloodshed. Most of the Indians were already dead drunk. Only a few, whose powers of endurance were greater than those of their comrades, continued to shout their war-songs. When these were down, the women rushed at the spirits like wolves. Even the little children came out from the tents and got their share. It was a terrible scene, such as has, alas! been often enacted before in the wilds of the Far West, and, doubtless, shall be enacted again, unless (so-called) Christian traders give up fire-water as an article of traffic.

In a very short space of time the women were as helpless as their masters. Then Gibault cut the thongs that bound his comrades, and set them free!

"Thanks, thanks to the Almighty," said Bertram, earnestly, when his bonds were cut. "I had thought that my days were numbered; that it was to be my sad fate to fill a grave here in the wilderness. But H's hand is indeed mighty to save. And thanks be to you, good Gibault. Under God we owe our lives to you."

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Bertram attempted to seize Gibault's hand as he spoke, but his own hands refused obedience to his will. They had been so long and so tightly bound that they were utterly powerless.

"Rub 'em, rub 'em well," said Gibault, seizing the artist's hands and enforcing his own recommendation vigorously.

"Ay, that's it," said Redhand, who, with his companions, had, the instant he was loose, commenced to rub and chafe his own benumbed limbs into vitality, as if his life and theirs depended on their exertions — as indeed they did to no small extent, for, had they been called upon to fight or fly at that moment, they could have done neither.

"Now, lads," said Bounce, who, having been a prisoner for but a short time, was unhurt by his bonds, "while ye rub the life into yer limbs I'll tell ye wot we must do. Them scamps (pointing to the prostrate Indians) won't lie there long. Of course, bein' white men an' Christians, we don't mean to kill them or to lift their scalps ——"

"I've know'd white men," interrupted Redhand, "who called themselves Christians, and didn't object to take scalps when they got the chance."

"So have I," returned Bounce, "an' more's the pity. It's sich-like blackguards as these that keeps honest trappers and fur-traders for iver in

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hot water here. Howsomediver, we're not agoin' to turn *our*selves into brute beasts 'cause they're turned *their*selves into sich."

"I'm not so sure o' that," broke in Big Waller, casting a scowling glance on the savages as he surveyed a wound in his left arm, which, although not serious, from want of dressing, sufficiently painful, "I calc'late it would serve them reptiles right if we was to whangskiver the whole on 'em as they lie."

"I don't b'lieve," retorted Bounce, "that '*whangskiver*' is either English, Injun, French, or Yankee; but if it means *killin'* you'll do nothing o' the sort. Here's what we'll do. We'll ketch as many horses as wos took from Mr. Bertram's fellers, an' as many guns too (the same ones if we can lay hands on 'em), an' as much powder an' shot an' other things as that keg o' brandy is worth, an' then we'll bid the red-skins good-by without wakenin' of 'em up."

"Goot," ejaculated Gibault, pausing in his manipulation of the artist, "now you can do!"

"Capital; thanks, I feel quite strong again."

"I say, Gibault," observed March, ruefully, "they've almost sawed through the skin o' my ankle. I've no left foot at all, as far as feelin' goes."

"Hah! me boy, 'tis well you have foot left, though you not feel left foot! Let me see."

"That's it, Gibault, rub away; if your jokes

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were as good as your surgery you'd be too good, a long way, for the backwoods."

By dint of chafing and rubbing and leaping and stamping, the whole party were soon restored to a serviceable condition, after which they set about active preparations for departure.

First they ransacked the tents, where they discovered all the guns that had been taken from Bertram's party. These they tied up in a bundle, after each had secured one for his own use. Among them the artist found, to his intense delight, his own double-barrelled gun, the loss of which he had mourned most sincerely.

Next, they secured the horses, which, being hobbled, as we have said elsewhere, were easily caught. Then the powder-horns and shot-belts of Bertram's party were found, and, being full of ammunition, were slung across their shoulders forthwith. Among other things belonging to the same party were discovered a number of blankets, some tea and sugar, and a variety of other useful articles, besides several packs of furs: all of which were made up into portable bundles that could be easily carried at their saddle-bows. The supply of every thing was so ample that it was not necessary to touch a single article belonging to the Indians.

This was a matter of much satisfaction to Redhand, who wished to show these unfortunate children of the wilderness that there were at

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least some white trappers who were actuated by different and kindlier feelings than many who sought their livelihood in those regions.

"Hullo! wot have we here?" cried Big Waller, who was poking inquisitively about among the tents, to the consternation of the poor Indian children, who lay huddled up in their rabbit-skin blankets, trembling from head to foot, and expecting to be scalped forthwith, — such of them, at least, as were old enough to expect any thing. "Here's your blunderbusses, I guess, mister."

"What! my pistols," cried Bertram, seizing his weapons with as much delight as if they had been really serviceable.

"Hah! ver' goot for play vid," observed Gibault, contemptuously.

"I say, here's something else," said Bounce, picking up a rifle.

"Wah!" exclaimed Hawkswing, pointing to the weapon in surprise, and turning his eyes on Redhand.

"Wot! d'ye know who it belonged to?" inquired Bounce.

An expression of deep sorrow overspread Redhand's countenance. "Ay," said he, mournfully, I know it well. It belonged to young Blake." Glancing quickly up at a place where several scalps were hanging to a pole, he took one down, and, after gazing at it sadly for a few seconds, he added, in a tone of deep melancholy — "Poor,

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poor Blake! ye had a hearty spirit an' a kindly heart. Your huntin' days are soon over!"

"Was he a friend of yours?" inquired Bertram, affected by the old trapper's look and tone.

"Ay, ay, he was, he was," said Redhand, quickly, and with a sternness of manner that surprised his companions; "come, lads, mount! mount! The redskins won't part with plunder without making an effort to get it back."

"But, stop a bit, Redhand," cried Bounce, detaining the old man, "ye did'nt use for to be so hot an' hasty. Where are we to go to? That's wot I want to know."

"True," observed Redhand, in his old gentle tones, "we've more horses than we need, and some furs to dispose of. There's a tradin' fort in the mountains, but it's a good bit from this."

"What o' that?" said March Marston, somewhat impetuously, "are we not armed and well mounted, and strong, and have we not lots o' time before us?"

"Well said," cried Bounce.

"Ditto," echoed Waller.

"Then we'll do it!" cried Redhand, vaulting into the saddle with a spring that a young man might have envied.

The others followed his example, and in a few seconds they were picking their way carefully down the ravine in which the Indian camp was

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situated. Leaving this quickly behind, they trotted briskly along the more open banks of the river until they gained a level sweep of land which terminated in a belt of low bushes. Beyond this lay the great plains. Breaking into a gallop, they speedily cleared the underwood, and just as the rosy smile of morning beamed in the eastern sky, they dashed away, with light hearts and loose reins, out upon the springy turf of the open prairie.

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CHAPTER X.

Short Treatise on Horseflesh. — Remarks on Slang. — Doings and and Sights on the Prairie. — The Mountain Fort.

A HORSE is a wonderful thing — if we may presume to style so noble a creature "a thing!" And the associations connected in some minds with a horse are wonderful associations. No doubt a horse, to many people, is a common-place enough sort of thing; and the associations connected with horseflesh in general, in some minds are decidedly low — having relation to tugging a cart, or tumbling along with a plough, or rattling with a cab, or prancing in a carriage, or being cut up into butcher's meat for cats and dogs. Nevertheless, a horse is a wonderful creature; and man's associations in connection with him are, not unfrequently, of the most wonderful and romantic kind. Talk to the warrior of his steed, and he will speak of him as of his dearest friend. Talk to the Arab of his horse, and he will talk of his pet, his spoiled child! As it is with these, so is it with the trapper of the western prairies.

After a few weeks' acquaintance, the trapper and his horse become one — part and parcel of each other, at least so far as it is possible for

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man and horse to amalgamate. On the one hand, the horse is tended, hobbled, patted, saddled, spoken to, watched over, and tenderly cared for by the man; on the other hand, the man is carried, respected, sometimes bitten (playfully), depended on, and loved by the horse. Day after day, and week after week, the limbs of the one and the ribs of the other are pressed against each other, until they become all but united, and the various play of muscles on the part of both becomes so delicately significant that the bridle, to a great extent, becomes unnecessary, and the rider feels when the horse is about to shy, just as quickly as the horse feels, by a gentle pressure on either side, how much the rider wishes him to diverge to the right or left.

Sometimes the horse breaks his hobbles and runs away, thus aggravating the spirits of, and causing infinite annoyance to, the man. Frequently the man, out of revenge for such or similar freaks, larrups and pains and worries the horse. But these little asperities are the occasional landmarks that give point and piquancy to the even tenor of their loving career. Neither would, for a moment, think of allowing such incidents to rankle in his bosom. Both would repudiate with scorn the idea that they were a whit less useful, or in any degree less attached to each other on account of such trifling tiffs!

Day after day, our trappers mounted their

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steeds and traversed the great prairie — now at a rattling trot, now at a tearing gallop; frequently at a quiet foot-pace, when the nature of the ground rendered a more rapid progress dangerous, or when the exhaustion of horses and men rendered rest necessary, or when the beautiful nature of the scenery and the warm, sunny condition of the atmosphere induced a contemplative frame of mind and a placid state of body.

Night after night, the horses — having stuffed themselves, like greedy things as they were, with the greenest and tenderest herbage on the rich plains — returned to the camp fire round which the trappers were lying in deep slumber, and each selecting his own master, would stand over him with drooping head and go to sleep, until dawn called them again to united action.

Thus day and night passed for the space of three weeks after the night of the surprise of the Indian camp, without any thing particular occurring; and thus quadrupeds and bipeds came to be so familiar and well acquainted with each other — so thoroughly united in sympathetic action — as almost to become hexapeds, if we may be permitted the expression.

March Marston's quadruped was a beautiful little bay, whose tendency to bound over every little stick and stone, as if it were a five-barred gate, and to run away upon any and every occasion, admirably suited the tastes and inclinations of its mercurial rider.

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There was one among the quadrupeds which was striking in appearance — not to say stunning. No; we won't say stunning, because that is a slang expression, and many persons object to slang expressions; therefore we will avoid that word; although we confess being unable to see why, if it is allowable (as every one will admit it is) to assert that men may be mentally "struck," it is not equally proper to say that they may be stunned. But we bow to prejudice. We won't say that the horse was "stunning." While on this subject, we think it right to guard ourself, parenthetically, from the charge of being favorable to *all* kinds of slang. We are in favor of speech — yes, we assert that broadly and fearlessly, without reservation — but we are not in favor of *all* speech. Coarse speech, for instance, we decidedly object to. So we are in favor of slang, but not of *all* slang. There are some slang words which are used instead of oaths, and these, besides being wicked, are exceedingly contemptible. Tempting, however, they are — too apt to slip from the tongue and from the pen, and to cause regret afterwards.

But to return. Although we won't say that the quadruped in question was stunning, we will say again that it was striking — so powerfully striking that the force of the stroke was calculated almost to stun. It was uncommonly tall, remarkably short in the body, and had a piebald

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coat. Morever, it had no tail — to speak of — as that member had, in some unguarded moment, got into the blaze of the camp fire and been burnt off close to the stump. The stump, however, was pretty long, and, at the time when the trappers became possessed of the animal, that appendage was covered with a new growth of sparsely scattered and very stiff hair, about three inches long, so that it resembled a gigantic bottle-brush. Being a spirited animal, the horse had a lively bottle-brush, which was grotesque, if it was nothing else.

This quadruped's own particular biped was Theodore Bertram. He had a peculiar liking for it (as he had for every thing picturesque), not only on account of its good qualities — which were an easy gait and a tender mouth — but also because it was his own original animal, that of which he had been deprived by the Indians, and which he had recaptured with feelings akin to those of a mother who recovers a long-lost child.

We have said that the space of three weeks passed without any thing particular occurring to our trappers. This remark, however, must be taken in a limited sense. Nothing particularly connected with the thread of this story occurred; though very many and particularly interesting things of a minor nature did occur during the course of that period.

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It would require a work equal in size to the "Encyclopædia Britannica" to contain all the interesting things that were said and seen and done on those prairies by these trappers within that brief space of time. A conscientiously particular chronicler of events would have detailed the route of each day, the latitude and longitude of each resting-place, the very nature of the wood which composed the fuel of each fire. He would have recorded that March Marston's little bay ran away with him (not, in a general way, fifty or a hundred times, but) exactly so many times, specifying the concomitant circumstances of each separate time, and the results of each particular race. He would have noted, with painful accuracy, the precise number of times in which Theodore Bertram (being a bad rider) fell off his horse, or was pitched off in consequence of that quadruped putting its foot inadvertently into badger-holes. He would have mentioned that on each occasion the unfortunate artist blackened his eye, or bled or skinned his nasal organ, and would have dilated anatomically on the peculiar color of the disfigured orb and the exact amount of damage done to the bruised nose. He would have told not only the general fact that bears, and elks, and antelopes, and prairie-dogs, and wolves, and buffaloes, were seen in great numbers continually, and were shot in abundance, but he would have recorded that Bertram did, on one occasion,

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in the height of his enthusiastic daring, give a shout and draw one of his blunderbuss pistols, on observing a grisly bear at a short distance ahead of him; that he dashed his heels violently against the sides of his remarkable horse; that the said horse did toss his head, shake his bottle-brush, and rush full-tilt toward the bear until he caught sight of it, when he turned off at a sharp angle, leaving Bertram on the plain at the mercy of the bear; that Bruin, who was in nowise alarmed, observing his condition, came to see what was the matter with him; and that he, Mr. Bertram, would certainly have fallen a victim to his own headstrong courage on the one hand, and to the bear's known tendency to rend human beings on the other, had not March come up at that moment and shot it through the heart, while Red-hand shot it through the brain.

And this supposed conscientious chronicler of events, had he been a naturalist, would have further detailed, with graphic particularity, the rich, exuberant, and varied flora of the region — from the largest plant that waved and blossomed in the prairie-winds to the lowliest flowret that nestled among the tender and sweet-scented grasses on the prairie's breast. In regard to the *fauna* of those regions, he would have launched out upon the form, the color, size, habits, peculiarities, &c., of every living thing, from the great buffalo (which he would have carefully explained

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was *not* the buffalo, but the *bison*) down to the sly, impudent, yet harmless little prairie-dog (which he would have also carefully noted was *not* the prairie-dog, but the *marmot*).

Had this supposed recorder of facts been of an erratic nature, given to wander from anecdote to description, and *vice versâ*, he would perhaps have told, in a parenthetical sort of way, how that, during these three weeks, the trappers enjoyed uninterrupted fine weather; how the artist sketched so indefatigably that he at last filled his book to overflowing and had to turn it upside down, begin at the end, and sketch on the backs of his previous drawings; how Big Waller and Black Gibault became inseparable friends and sang duets together when at full gallop, the latter shrieking like a wild cat, the former roaring like a buffalo bull; how March Marston became madder than ever, and infected his little steed with the same disease, so that the two together formed a species of insane compound that caused Redhand and Bounce to give vent to many a low chuckle and many a deep sagacious remark, and induced Hawkswing to gaze at it — the compound — in grave astonishment.

All this and a great deal more might be told, and, no doubt, might prove deeply interesting. But, as no man can do every thing, so no man can record every thing; therefore we won't attempt it, but shall at once, and without further delay, pro-

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ceed to that part of our tale which bears more directly on the Rocky Mountains and the Wild Man of the West himself.

"It's a strong place," said Redhand, checking the pace of his horse and pointing to a small edifice or fort which stood on the summit of a little mound or hill about a quarter of a mile in advance of them — "a very strong place — such as would puzzle the redskins to break into if defended by men of ordinary pluck."

"Men of pluck sometimes get careless, and go to sleep, though," said March Marston, riding up to the old trapper; "I've heard o' such forts bein' taken by redskins before now."

"So have I, lad, so have I," returned Redhand; "I've heard o' a fort bein' attacked by Injuns when the men were away huntin', an' bein' burnt down. But it ginerally turns out that the whites have had themselves to thank for't."

"Ay, that's true," observed Bounce; "some o' the whites in them parts is no better nor they should be. They treats the poor Injuns as if they wos dogs or varmints, an' then they're astonished if the redskins murder them out o' revenge. I know'd one feller as told me that when he lived on the west side o' the mountains, where some of the Injuns are a murderin' set o' thieves, he niver lost a chance o' killin' a redskin. Of course the redskins niver lost a chance o' killin' the whites; an' so they come to sich a state

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o' war, that they had to make peace by givin' them no end o' presents o' guns an' cloth an' beads — enough to buy up the furs o' a whole tribe."

"I guess they was powerful green to do any thing o' the sort," said Big Waller; "I know'd a feller as was in command of a party o' whites, who got into much the same sort of fix with the Injuns — always fightin' and murderin'; so what does he do, think ye?"

"Shooted de chief and all hims peepil," suggested Gibault.

"Nothin' o' the sort," replied Waller. "He sends for the chief, an' gives him a grand present, an' says he wants to marry his darter. An' so he *did* marry his darter, right off, an' the whites an' redskins was friends ever after that. The man what did that was a gentleman too — so they said; tho' for my part I don't know wot a gentleman is — no more do I b'lieve there ain't sich a thing; but if there be, an' it means any thing good, I calc'late that that man *wos* a gentleman, for w'en he grew old he took his old squaw to Canada with him, 'spite the larfin' o' his comrades, who said he'd have to sot up a wigwam for her in his garden. But he says, 'No,' says he, 'I married the old ooman for better an' for worse, an' I'll stick by her to the last. There's too many o' you chaps as leaves yer wives behind ye when ye go home — I'm detarmined to sot ye a better ex-

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ample.' An' so he did. He tuk her home an' put her in a grand house in some town in Canada — I don't well mind which, — but when he wasn't watchin' of her, the old ooman would squat down on the carpet in the drawin'-room, for, d'ye see, she hadn't bin used to chairs. His frinds used to advise him to put her away, an' the kindlier sort said he should give her a room to herself, and not bring her into company where she warn't at ease; but no, the old man said always, 'She's my lawful wedded wife, an' if she was a buffalo cow I'd stick by her to the last' — an' so he did."

"Vraiment he was von cur'ous creetur," observed Gibault.

"See, they have descried us!" exclaimed Bertram, pointing to the fort, which they were now approaching, and where a bustle among the inhabitants showed that their visitors were not always peacefully disposed, and that it behoved them to regard strangers with suspicion.

"Would it not be well to send one of our party on in advance with a white flag?" observed Bertram.

"No need for that," replied Redhand, "they're used to all kinds o' visitors — friends as well as foes. I fear, however, from the haste they show in closing their gate that they aint on good terms with the Injuns."

The redmen and the pale-faces are at war," said Hawkswing.

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"Ay, you're used to the signs, no doubt," returned Redhand, "for you've lived here once upon a time, I b'lieve."

The Indian made no reply, but a dark frown overspread his countenance for a few minutes. When it passed, his features settled down into their usual state of quiet gravity.

"Have ye ever seed that fort before?" inquired Bounce, in the Indian tongue.

"I have," answered Hawkswing. "Many moons have passed since I was in this spot. My nation was strong then. It is weak now. Few braves are left. We sometimes carried our furs to that fort to trade with the pale-faces. It is called the Mountain Fort. The chief of the pale-faces was a bad man then. He loved fire-water too much. If he is there still, I do not wonder that there is war between him and the redmen."

"That's bad," said Bounce, shaking his head slowly — "very bad; for the redskins 'll kill us if they can, on account o' them rascally fur-traders. Hows'ever we can't mend it, so we must bear it."

As Bounce uttered this consolatory remark, the party cantered up to the open space in front of the gate of the fort, just above which a man was seen quietly leaning over the wooden walls of the place with a gun resting on his arm.

"Hallo!" shouted this individual, when they came within hail.

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"Hallo!" responded Bounce.

"Friends or foes, and where from?" inquired the laconic guardian of the fort.

"Friends," replied Redhand, riding forward, "we come from the Yellowstone. Have lost some of our property, but got some of it back and want to trade furs with you."

To this the sentinel made no reply, but, looking straight at Big Waller, inquired abruptly, — "Are you the Wild Man?"

"Wot wild man?" said Waller, gruffly.

"Why, the Wild Man o' the West."

"No, I hain't," said Waller, still more gruffly, for he did not feel flattered by the question.

"Have you seen him?"

"No, I hain't, an' guess I shouldn't know him if I had."

"Why do you ask?" inquired March Marston, whose curiosity had been roused by these unexpected questions.

"Cause I want to know," replied the man, quitting his post and disappearing. In a few minutes he opened the gate, and the trappers trotted into the square of the fort.

The Mountain Fort, in which they now dismounted, was one of those little wooden erections in which the hardy pioneers of the fur-trade were wont in days of old to establish themselves, in the very heart of the Indian country. Such forts may still be seen in precisely similar cir-

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cumstances, and built in the same manner, at the present day, in the Hudson's Bay territories; with this difference that the Indians, having had long experience of the good intentions and the kindness of the pale-faces, no longer regard them with suspicion. The walls were made of strong tall palisades, with bastions built of logs at the corners, and a gallery running all round inside close to the top of the walls, so that the defenders of the place could fire over the palisades, if need be, at their assailants. There was a small iron cannon in each bastion. One large gate formed the entrance, but this was only opened to admit horsemen or carts; a small wicket in one leaf of the gate formed the usual entrance.

The buildings within the fort consisted of three little houses, one being a store, the others dwelling-houses, about which several men and women and Indian children, besides a number of dogs, were grouped. These immediately surrounded the trappers as they dismounted. "Who commands here?" inquired Redhand.

"I do," said the sentinel before referred to, pushing aside the others and stepping forward, "at least I do at present. My name's McLeod. He who ought to command is drunk. He's *always* drunk."

There was a savage gruffness in the way in which McLeod said this that surprised the vis-

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itors, for his sturdy-looking and honest countenance seemed to accord ill with such tones.

"An' may I ask who *he* is?" said Redhand.

"Oh, yes; his name's Macgregor — you can't see him to-night, though. There 'll be bloody work here before long if he don't turn over a new leaf ——"

McLeod checked himself as if he felt that he had gone too far. Then he added in a tone that seemed much more natural to him — "Now, sirs, come this way. Here" (turning to the men who stood by), "look to these horses and see them fed. Come into the hall, friends, an' the squaws will prepare something for you to eat while we have a smoke and a talk together."

So saying, this changeable man, who was a strange compound of a trapper and a gentleman, led the way to the principal dwelling-house, and, throwing open the door, ushered his guests into the reception-hall of the Mountain Fort.

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CHAPTER XI.

Original Efforts in the Art of Painting. — Fur-trading Hospitality. — Wonderful Accounts of the Wild Man of the West, from an Eye-witness. — Buffalo-hunting, Scalping, Murdering, and a Summary Method of inflicting Punishment.

THE reception-hall of the Mountain Fort, into which, as we have stated, the trappers were ushered by McLeod, was one of those curious apartments which were in those days (and in a few cases still are) created for the express purpose of "astonishing the natives!"

It was a square room, occupying the centre of the house, and having doors all round, which opened into the sleeping or other departments of the dwelling. In the front wall of this room were the door, which led direct into the open air, and the two windows. There were no passages in the house — it was all rooms and doors. One of these doors, toward the back, opened into a species of scullery — but it was not exactly a scullery, neither was it a kitchen, neither was it a pantry. The squaws lived there—especially the cooking-squaws — and a few favored dogs. A large number of pots and pans and kettles, besides a good deal of lumber and provisions in daily use, also

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dwelt there. A door led from this room out to the back of the house, and into a small off-shoot, which was the kitchen proper. Here a spirited French Canadian reigned supreme in the midst of food, fire, and steam, smoke, smells, and fat.

But, to return to the reception-hall. There were no pictures on its walls, no draperies about its windows, no carpets on its floors, no cloths on its tables, and no ornaments on its mantel-shelf. Indeed, there was no mantel-shelf to put ornaments upon. The floor, the walls, the ceiling, the chairs, the tables, all were composed of the same material — wood. The splendor of the apartment was entirely due to paint. Every thing was painted — and that with a view solely to startling effect. Blue, red, and yellow, in their most brilliant purity, were laid on in a variety of original devices, and with a boldness of contrast that threw Moorish effort in that line quite into the shade. The Alhambra was nothing to it! The floor was yellow ochre; the ceiling was sky-blue; the cornices were scarlet, with flutings of blue and yellow, and, underneath, a broad belt of fruit and foliage, executed in an extremely arabesque style. The walls were light green, with narrow bands of red down the sides of each plank. The table was yellow, the chairs blue, and their bottoms red, by way of harmonious variety. But the grand point — the great masterpiece in the ornamentation of this apartment — was the centre-

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piece in the ceiling, in the execution of which there was an extraordinary display of what can be accomplished by the daring flight of an original genius revelling in the conscious possession of illimitable power, without the paralyzing influence of conventional education.

The device itself was indescribable. It was a sun, or a star, or, rather, a union and commingling of suns and stars in violent contrast, wreathed with fanciful fruits and foliage, and Cupids, and creatures of the now extinct species. The rainbow had been the painter's palette; Genius his brush; Fancy-gone-mad his attendant; the total temporary stagnation of redskin faculties his object, and ecstasy his general state of mind, when he executed this magnificent *chef d'œuvre* in the centre of the ceiling of the reception-hall at the Mountain Fort.

The fire-place was a capacious cavern in the wall opposite the entrance-door, in which, during winter, there usually burned a roaring bonfire of huge logs of wood, but where, at the time of which we write, there was just enough fire to enable visitors to light their pipes. When that fire blazed up in the dark winter nights, the effect of that gorgeous apartment was dazzling — absolutely bewildering.

The effect upon our trappers when they entered was sufficiently strong. They gazed round in amazement, each giving vent to his feelings in his

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own peculiar exclamatory grunt, or gasp, or cough. In addition to this, Bounce smote his thigh with unwonted vigor. Gibault, after gazing for a few minutes, sighed out something that sounded like *magnifique!* and Bertram grinned from ear to ear; —he went further; he laughed aloud — an unpolite thing to do, in the circumstances, and, for a grave man like him, an unusual ebullition of feeling. But it was observed and noted that on this occasion the artist did not draw forth his sketch-book.

McLeod, who, from his speech and bearing, was evidently a man of some education, placed chairs for his visitors, took the lid off a large canister of tobacco, and pushing it into the middle of the yellow table, said —

"Sit ye down, friends, and help yourselves."

He set them the example by taking down his own pipe from a nail in the wall, and proceeding to fill it. Having done so, he took a piece of glowing charcoal from the fire, and, placing it on the bowl, began to smoke, glancing the while, with an amused expression on his grave face, at the trappers, who, while filling their pipes, kept gazing round the walls and up at the ceiling.

"Ha!" said he, "you are struck with our hall (puff, puff). It's rather (puff) an effective one (puff). Have a light?"

Bounce, to whom the light was offered, accepted the same; applied it to his pipe, and said —

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"Well, yes (puff), it is (puff, puff), raither wot ye may call (puff) pecooliar."

"Most visitors to this place think so," said McLeod. "The Indians highly approve of it, and deem me quite a marvel of artistic power."

"Wot! did *you* paint it?" inquired Waller.

"I did," answered McLeod, with a nod.

"Vraiment, de Injuns am right in deir opinion of you," cried Gibault, relighting his pipe, which, in the astonished state of his mind, he had allowed to go out.

McLeod smiled, if we may so speak, *gravely*, in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Ha!" cried Gibault, turning to Bertram, as if a sudden thought had occurred to him, "Monsieur Bertram et Monsieur Mak Load, you be broders. Oui, Monsieur Mak Load, dis mine comrade — him be von painteur."

"Indeed?" said McLeod, turning to the artist with more interest than he had yet shown toward the strangers.

"I have, indeed, the honor to follow the noble profession of painting," said Bertram, "but I cannot boast of having soared so high as — as —"

"As to attempt the frescoes on the ceiling of a reception-hall in the backwoods," interrupted McLeod, laughing. "No, I believe you, sir; but, although I cannot presume to call you brother professionally, still I trust that I may do so as an amateur. I am delighted to see you here. It is

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not often we are refreshed with the sight of the face of a civilized man in these wild regions."

"Upon my word, sir, you are plain-spoken," said March Marston, with a look of affected indignation; "what do you call *us?*"

"Pardon me, young sir," replied McLeod, "I call you trappers, which means neither civilized nor savage; neither fish, nor flesh, nor fowl——"

"That's a foul calumny," cried Bounce, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and refilling it from the canister; "it's wot may be called a — a —"

"Lie," suggested Waller.

"No," said Bounce, "it ain't that. I don't like that word. It's a ugly word, an' you shouldn't ought to use it, Waller. It's a *error;* that's wot it is, in a feelosophical pint o' view. Jest as much of a error, now, as it was in you, Mister McLeod, putting so little baccy in this here thing that there ain't none left."

"What! is it all done?" cried McLeod, rising, and seizing the canister; "so it is. I declare you smoke almost as fast as the Wild Man himself; for whom I mistook you, Mr. Waller, when I saw you first, at some distance off."

Saying this, he left the room to fetch a further supply of the soothing weed, and at the same moment two squaws appeared, bearing smoking dishes of white-fish and venison.

"That fellow knows something about the Wild Man o' the West," said March Marston, in a low,

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eager tone, to his comrades. "Twice has he mentioned his name since we arrived."

"So he has," observed Redhand, "but there may be other wild men besides our one."

"Unpossible," said Bounce, emphatically.

"Ditto," cried Waller, still more emphatically "what say you, Hawkswing?"

"There is but one Wild Man of the West," replied the Indian.

"By the way, Hawkswing, what was the name o' the rascally trader you said was in charge o' this fort when you lived here?" asked Redhand.

"Mokgroggir," replied the Indian.

"Ha, Macgregor, ye mean, no doubt."

Hawkswing nodded.

"Here you are, friends," said McLeod, reëntering the room with a large roll of tobacco. "Help yourselves and don't spare it. There's plenty more where that came from. But I see the steaks are ready, so let us fall to, we can smoke afterwards."

During the repast, to which the trappers applied themselves with the gusto of hungry men, March Marston questioned McLeod about the Wild Man.

"The Wild Man o' the West," said he in some surprise; "is it possible there are trappers in the Rocky Mountains who have not heard of *him?*"

"Oh, yes," said March, hastily, "we've heard

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of him, but we want to hear more particularly about him, for the accounts don't all agree."

"Ha! that's it," said Bounce, speaking with difficulty through a large mouthful of fish, "that's it. They don't agree. One says his rifle is thirty feet long, another forty feet, an' so on. There's no gittin' at truth in this here ——"

A bone having stuck in Bounce's throat at that moment he was unable to conclude the sentence.

"As to the length of his rifle," said McLeod, when the noise made by Bounce in partially choking had subsided, "you seem to have got rather wild notions about that, and about the Wild Man too, I see."

"But he *is* a giant, isn't he?" inquired March, anxiously.

"N — not exactly. Certainly he is a big fellow, about the biggest man I ever saw — but he's not forty feet high!"

March Marston's romantic hopes began to sink. "Then he's an ordinary man just like one o' us," he said, almost gloomily.

"Nay, that he is not," returned McLeod, laughing. "Your comrade Waller does indeed approach to him somewhat in height, but he's nothing to him in breadth; and as for ferocity, strength, and activity, I never saw any thing like him in my life. He comes sometimes here to exchange his furs for powder and lead, but he'll

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speak to no one, except in the sharpest, gruffest way. I think he's mad myself. But he seems to lead a charmed life here; for although he has had fights with many of the tribes in these parts, he always puts them to flight, although he fights single-handed."

"Single-handed!" exclaimed Bounce in surprise.

"Ay. I've seen him at it myself, and can vouch for it, that if ever there was a born fiend let loose on this earth it's the Wild Man of the West when he sets-to to thrash a dozen Indians. But I must do him the justice to say, that I never heard of him making an unprovoked attack on anybody. When he first came to these mountains, many years ago — before I came here — the Indians used to wonder who he was and what he meant to do; then after a while, seeing he had a good horse, a good rifle, and plenty of ammunition, they tried to kill him; but the first fellow that tried that only tried it once. He lay in a close thicket nigh to where the Wild Man used to pass from his home in the mountains to places where he used to hunt the elk and the buffalo, so, when he came up, the Indian laid an arrow on his bow. But the Wild Man's eye was sharp as a needle. He stopped his horse, took aim like a flash of lightning, and shot him through the head. I heard this from another Indian that was with the murderin' fel-

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low that was shot. The Wild Man did nothing to the other. He let him escape.

"Of course the relations of the man who was killed were up immediately, and twenty of them set out to murder the Wild Man. They took their horses, spears, and bows with them, and lay in wait at a place where he was often seen passing. Sure enough, up he came, on horseback, at a slow walk, looking as careless and easy as if no blood of a redskin rested on his hand.

"It chanced the day before that day that we had run out of fresh meat, so Mr. Macgregor, our commandant here, ordered me to take three of the men, and go out after the buffaloes. Away we went, looking sharp out, however, for some of the Indians had been treated by Macgregor so brutally, I am sorry to say, that we knew our scalps were not safe. Next morning I happened to pass close by the place where the Indians lay in ambush, and we came to the top of a precipice that overlooked the spot. We saw them before they saw us, so we went quietly back into the bush, tied our horses to trees, and lay on the edge of the cliff to watch them.

"In about ten minutes after we saw the Wild Man riding slowly forward. He was a strange sight. It was the first time I had seen him, although I had often heard of him before.

"Well, on he came, with his head bent and his

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eyes fixed on the ground. A dense thicket hid his enemies from him, though not from us, we being so high above them. The Wild Man was armed with his long rifle slung at his back, a hunting knife, and a small shield, such as the Blackfoot Indians use to protect themselves from arrows. The only unusual sort of weapon he carried was a long sword.

"Not knowing at the time that the Indians were waiting for him, of course I gave no alarm to warn him of his danger. When he came within a hundred yards of the thicket, I saw him push his arm a little further into the handles of the shield. It was but a slight action such as one might perform to ease the arm by change of position; but the redskins are quick-witted. They knew that he suspected they were there, so, giving one tremendous yell, they sent a cloud of arrows at him, and sprang out upon the plain at full gallop with their spears lowered.

"Instead of turning to fly from such an unequal combat, the Wild Man drew his sword and rushed at them like a thunderbolt. His onset was the most awful thing I ever saw in my life. The plain seemed to shake under the tread of his gigantic horse. His hair streamed wildly out behind him, and as he was coming toward me I could see that his teeth were set and his eyes flashed like those of a tiger. The Indians were appalled by the sight. The idea of one man

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attacking twenty had never occurred to them. They drew up; but it was too late to prevent a shock. There was a yell from the savages, a shout like the roar of a lion from the Wild Man, and two horses and their riders lay on the plain. I saw the long sword gleam for one moment, just as the shock took place, and the head of a savage rolled immediately after along the ground.

"The Indians, though overawed, were brave men. They turned to pursue the flying horseman, but they needed not. The Wild Man was not flying, he was only unable at first to check the headlong pace of his charger. In a few seconds he wheeled about and charged again. The Indians, however, did not await the issue; they turned and fled, and they have ever since remained in the firm belief that the Wild Man is a "great medicine" man, and that no one can kill him. They say that neither arrows nor bullets can pierce his skin, which is an inch thick; that fire and smoke come out of his mouth and eyes, and that his horse is, like himself, invulnerable. I must confess, however, that, with the exception of his enormous size and his ferocity, he is, from what I saw of him, much the same as other men."

McLeod concluded his description of this singular being, to which his guests listened open-eyed and mouthed, and helped himself to a buffalo-steak.

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"An' what did he when the Indians ran away?" inquired March Marston.

"Oh! he quietly pulled up his horse and let them run. After they were gone, he continued his journey, as slow and cool as if nothing had happened. Few Indians attack him now, except new bands from distant parts of the country, who don't know him; but all who meddle with him find, to their cost, that it would have been better had they let him alone."

"Is he cruel? Does he eat men and childers?" inquired Bounce, commencing a fourth steak with a degree of violent energy that suggested the possibility of his being himself able to do some execution in the cannibal line, if necessary.

McLeod laughed. "Oh, dear, no; he's not cruel. Neither does he eat human flesh. In fact, he has been known to do some kind acts to poor starving Indians when they least expected it. The real truth is, that he is only fierce when he's meddled with. He never takes revenge, and he has never been known to lift a scalp."

"But what like is he when he comes to trade his furs at the fort here? how does he speak, and in what language?" inquired Marston, who, although delighted with the account given of the strength and valor of the Wild Man of the West, was by no means pleased to learn that he was not an absolute giant, something like the giant Despair of whom he had read in the "Pilgrim's Progress."

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"He's just like a trapper — only he's a tremendous big one — six feet six, if he's an inch, and would make two of the biggest of the present company round the shoulders. But he's very silent, and won't let any one question him. The long and the short of it is, that I believe he is a madman — luckily he's a well-disposed madman, and I can vouch for it he is a crack hunter, though he don't bring many furs to trade. I think he spends most of his idle time in moping among the caves of the mountains."

"Does any one know where he lives?" asked Bertram, who was gradually becoming interested in this strange being.

"No. We have sometimes tried to track him, but at a certain place we have invariably lost all traces of him."

"But what is his face like, and how does he dress?" inquired March, eagerly; "you have not yet said any thing about that."

McLeod was about to reply, when he was interrupted by a loud shouting in the yard of the fort. Leaping from their seats, the whole party ran to the windows.

"I thought so," cried McLeod, seizing his cap and hurrying out. "These are six of my men who have been out after the buffalo, and I see they have been successful."

The fort-gate had been swung open, and, just as the guests issued from the reception-hall, six

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hunters galloped into the square with all the reckless noise and dash peculiar to that class of men. Leaping from their foaming steeds, they were quickly surrounded by their comrades, and by the women and children of the place, who congratulated them on their success in the chase, and plied them with eager questions.

That they had indeed been successful, was evident from the masses of fresh meat with which the horses were laden.

"Well done, Davis," said McLeod, stepping up to one of the men, who, from his age and intelligence, had been put in command of the hunting party. "You are back sooner than I anticipated. Surely, your good genius sent the buffalo across your path."

"We have bin in luck, sir," replied the hunter, touching his cap. "We've killed more than we could carry, an', what's worse, we've killed more than we wanted."

"How so?"

"We've had a brush wi' the redskins, sir, an we had to kill one or two in self-defence."

McLeod's brow darkened. He clenched his teeth, and the large veins swelled in his neck and forehead. With a powerful effort he repressed his anger, and said, —

"Did I not warn you to avoid that if you could?"

"True, sir," replied Davis, humbly; "but we

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could not help it; for in the first heat of passion, one o' them was shot, an' after that, of course, we had to fight to save our own scalps."

"Who fired that first shot?" inquired McLeod, sternly.

Davis made no reply, but all eyes were at once turned upon a tall slouching man, with a forbidding cast of countenance, who had hitherto kept in the background.

"So, so, Larocque," said McLeod, stepping up to the man, "you've been at your bloody work again, you scoundrel. Hah! you not only bring the enmity of the whole Indian race down on your own worthless head, and on the heads of your innocent companions, but you have the effrontery to bring the evidence of your guilt into this fort along with you."

As McLeod spoke, he laid hold of a scalp which still dropped fresh blood as it hung at the hunter's saddle-bow.

"If I'm to answer to you for every scalp I choose to lift in self-defence, the sooner I quit you the better," answered Larocque, sulkily.

"Was there any occasion to lift this scalp at all?" demanded McLeod, as he seized the man by the collar.

"Who talks of lifting scalps?" growled a loud deep-toned voice.

All eyes were instantly turned on the speaker,

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and the crowd fell back to permit Mr. Macgregor, the person in command of the Mountain Fort, to approach the scene of action.

The man who now appeared on the scene was a sad and a terrible sight to behold. He was one of that wretched class of human beings who, having run a long course of unbridled wickedness, become total wrecks in body and mind long before the prime of manhood has been passed. Macgregor had been a confirmed drunkard for many years. He had long lost all power of self-control, and had now reached that last fearful stage when occasional fits of *delirium tremens* rendered him more like a wild beast than a man. Being a large and powerful man, and naturally passionate, he was at these times a terror to all who came near him. He had been many years in charge of the fur-trading establishment, and having on many occasions maltreated the Indians, he was hated by them most cordially.

One of his mad fits had been on him for some days before the arrival of March Marston and his friends. He had recovered sufficiently to be able to stagger out of his room just at the time the buffalo-hunters, as above described, entered the square of the fort. As he strode forward, with nothing on but his shirt and trousers, his eyes bloodshot, his hair matted and dishevelled, and his countenance haggard in the extreme, he was the most pitiable, and, at the same time, most

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terrible specimen of human degradation that the mind of man could conceive of.

"What now; who has been lifting scalps?" he growled between his set teeth, striding up to Larocque, and glaring in his face, with his blood-shot eyes, like a tiger.

McLeod held up the bloody scalp.

"Who did it?" roared Macgregor.

"I did," said Larocque, with an attempt at a defiant air.

The words had barely passed his lips when he received a blow between the eyes that felled him to the earth. He attempted to rise, but, with a yell that sounded more like the war-cry of a savage than the wrathful shout of a civilized man, Macgregor knocked him down again, and, springing at his throat, began to strangle him.

Up to this point, McLeod refrained from interfering, for he was not sorry to see the murderer receive such severe punishment; but, having no desire to witness a second murder, he now seized his master, and, with the assistance of two of the men, succeeded in tearing him off from Larocque, and in conveying him, as respectfully as possible in the circumstances, to his private chamber.

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CHAPTER XII.

An Argument on Argumentation; also on Religion.— Bounce "feelosophical" again.— A Race cut short by a Bullet.— Flight and Pursuit of the Redskins.

WHEN McLeod returned to the square, he found that the trappers had adjourned with the men of the establishment to enjoy a social pipe together, and that Theodore Bertram was taking a solitary, meditative promenade in front of the gate of the fort.

"You seem in a pensive mood, Mr. Bertram," said the fur-trader on coming up, "will you not try the soothing effects of a pipe? Our tobacco is good; I can recommend it."

He offered a plug of tobacco to the artist as he spoke.

"Thank you, I do not smoke," said Bertram, declining the proffered luxury. "Tobacco may be good — though I know it not from experience. Yet, methinks, the man is wiser who does not create an unnatural taste, than he who does so for the purpose of gratifying it."

"Ah! you are a philosopher."

"If judging of things and questions simply on

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their own merit, and with the single object of ascertaining what is truth in regard to them, constitutes a philosopher, I am."

"Don't you find that men who philosophize in that way are usually deemed an obstinate generation by their fellow men?" inquired the trader, smiling as he puffed a voluminous cloud from his lips.

"I do," replied Bertram.

"And don't you think the charge is just?" continued the other, in a jocular tone."

"I do not," replied the artist. "I think those who call them obstinate are often much more truly deserving of the epithet. Philosophers, in the popular sense of the word, are men who not only acquire knowledge and make themselves acquainted with the opinions of others, but who make independent use of acquired knowledge, and thus originate new ideas and frequently arrive at new conclusions. They thus often come to differ from the rest of mankind on many points, and, having good reasons for this difference of opinion, they are ever ready to explain and expound their opinions and to prove their correctness, or to receive proof of their incorrectness, if that can be given — hence they are called argumentative. Being unwilling to give up what appears to them to be truth, unless it can be shown to be falsehood, their opinions are not easily overturned — hence they are called obstinate.

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Thinking *out* a subject in a calm, dispassionate, logical manner, from its first proposition to its legitimate conclusion, is laborious to all. A very large class of men and women have no patience for such a process of investigation — hence argumentation, that most noble of all mental exercises, is deemed a nuisance. Certainly argumentation with unphilosophical persons *is* a nuisance; but I know of few earthly enjoyments more gratifying than an argument with a true philosopher."

"That's wot I says, so I do, out-an'-out," observed Bounce, who had come up unperceived, and had overheard the greater part of the above remarks. "Jist wot I thinks myself, Mr. Bertram, only I couldn't 'xactly put it in the same way, d'ye see. That's wot I calls out-an'-out feelosophy."

"Glad to hear you're such a wise fellow," said McLeod, patronizingly. "So you agree, of course, with Mr. Bertram in condemning the use of the pipe."

"Condemn the pipe?" said Bounce, pulling out his own special favorite and beginning to fill it, — "wot, condemn smokin'? No, by no means wotsomdiver. That's quite another keewestion, wot we haint bin a disputin' about. I only heered Mr. Bertram a-talkin' about obst'nitness an' argementation."

"Well, in regard to that," said Bertram, "I firmly believe that men and women are all alike equally obstinate."

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"Ha!" ejaculated Bounce, with that tone of mingled uncertainty and profound consideration which indicates an unwillingness to commit oneself in reference to a new and startling proposition.

"On what grounds do you think so?" asked McLeod.

"Why on the simple ground that a man *cannot* change any opinion until he is convinced that it is wrong, and that he inevitably must, and actually does, change his opinion on the instant that he is so convinced; and that in virtue, not of his will, but of the constitution of his mind. Some men's minds are of such a nature — they take such a limited and weak grasp of things — that they cannot be easily convinced. Others are so powerful that they readily seize upon truth when it is presented to them; but in either case, the instant the point of conviction is reached the mind is changed. Pride may indeed prevent the admission of this change, but it takes place, as I have said, inevitably."

At this Bounce opened his eyes to their utmost possible width and said solemnly, "Wot! do ye mean for to tell me, then, that there ain't no sich thing as obstinacy?" He accompanied this question with a shake of the head which implied that if Bertram were to argue till doomsday he would never convince him (Bounce) of that.

"By no means," returned the artist, smiling,

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"there is plenty of it, but obstinacy does not consist in the simple act of holding one's opinion firmly."

"Wot *does* it consist of, then?"

"In this:—in holding firmly to opinions that have been taken hastily up, without the grounds on which they are founded having been duly weighed; and in refusing to consider these grounds in a philosophical (which means a rational) way, because the process would prove tiresome. The man who has comfortably settled all his opinions in this way, very much resembles that 'fool' of whom it is written that he 'is wiser in his own conceit than seven men who can *render a reason.*'"

"Well, but, to come back to the starting-point," said McLeod, "many wise men smoke."

"If you say that in the way of argument, I meet it with the counter proposition, that many wise men *don't* smoke."

"Hah!" ejaculated Bounce, but whether Bounce's ejaculation was one of approval or disapproval we cannot tell. Neither can we tell what conclusion these philosophers came to in regard to smoking, because, just then, two horsemen were seen approaching the fort at full speed.

Seeing that they were alone, McLeod took no precautions to prevent surprise. He knew well enough that Indians frequently approach in this manner, so waited in front of the gate, coolly

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smoking his pipe, until the savages were within a few yards of him. It seemed as if they purposed running him down, but just as they came to within a couple of bounds of him, they drew up so violently as to throw their foaming steeds on their haunches.

Leaping to the ground, the Indians — who were a couple of strong, fine-looking savages, dressed in leathern costume, with the usual ornaments of bead and quill work, tags, and scalp-locks — came forward and spoke a few words to McLeod in the Cree language, and immediately after, delivering their horses to the care of one of the men of the establishment, accompanied him to the store.

In less than half an hour they returned to the gate, when the Indians remounted, and, starting away at their favorite pace — full gallop — were soon out of sight.

"Them fellows seem to be in a hurry," remarked Bounce, as they disappeared.

"Ay, they're after mischief too," replied McLeod, in a sad tone of voice. "They are two Cree chiefs who have come here for a supply of ammunition to hunt the buffalo, but I know they mean to hunt different game, for I heard them talking to each other about a war party of Blood Indians being in this part of the country. Depend upon it scalps will be taken ere long. 'Tis a sad, sad state of things. Blood, blood,

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blood seems to be the universal cry here, and, now that we've had so many quarrels with the redskins, I fear that the day is not far distant when blood will flow even in the Mountain Fort. I see no prospect for a better state of things, for savage nature cannot be changed. It seems a hopeless case."

"There was a touch of pathos in the tone in which this was said that was very different from McLeod's usual bold and reckless manner. It was evident that his natural disposition was kind, hearty, and peaceable; but that the constant feuds in which he was involved, both in the fort and out of it, had soured his temper and rendered him wellnigh desperate.

"You are wrong, sir, in saying that their case is hopeless," said Bertram, earnestly. "There is a remedy."

"I wish you could show it me," replied the trader.

"Here it is," returned the artist, taking his little Testament from the inside pocket of his hunting-shirt. "The gospel is able to make all men wise unto salvation."

McLeod shook his head, and said, "It won't do here. To be plain with you, sir, I don't believe the gospel's of any use in these wild regions, where murder seems to be as natural to man, woman, and child as food."

"But, sir," rejoined Bertram, "you forget that

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our Saviour himself says that he came not to call the righteous but *sinners* to repentance. In this volume we are told that the blood of Christ cleanseth us from *all* sin; and, not only have we his assurance that none who come unto him shall be cast out, but we have examples in al parts of the known world of men and women who were once steeped to the lips in every species of gross iniquity having been turned to the service of God through faith in Christ, and that by the power of the Holy Spirit, who, in this Word of God, is promised freely to them that simply ask."

"It may be so," returned McLeod; "I have not studied these things much. I don't profess to be a very religious man, and I cannot pretend to know much of what the gospel has done elsewhere; but I feel quite sure that it cannot do much *here*."

"Then you do not believe the Bible, which says distinctly that this 'gospel is the power of God unto salvation to *every one* that believeth.'"

"Ay, but these wretched Indians won't believe," objected the trader.

"True," answered Bertram; "they have not faith by nature, and they *won't* because they *can't* believe; but faith is the gift of God, and it is to be had for the asking."

"To that I answer that they'll never ask."

"How do you know? Did you ever give them

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a trial? Did you ever preach the gospel to them?"

"No, I never did that."

"Then you cannot tell how they would treat it. Your remarks are mere assertions of opinion—not arguments. You know the wickedness of the Indians, and can, therefore, speak authoritatively on that point; but you know not (according to your own admission), the power of the gospel; therefore you are not in a position to speak on that point."

McLeod was about to reply, when he was interrupted by the approach of Mr. Macgregor, who had now recovered somewhat from the effects of his violent fit of passion. Having observed during the *mêlée* that strangers had arrived at his fort, he had washed and converted himself into a more presentable personage, and now came forward to the group of trappers, all of whom had assembled at the gate. Addressing them in a tone of affable hospitality he said, —

"Good day, friends; I'm glad to see you at the Mountain Fort. That blackguard Larocque somewhat ruffled my temper. He's been the cause of much mischief here, I assure you. Do you intend to trap in these parts?"

The latter part of this speech was addressed to Redhand, who replied, —

"We do mean to try our luck in these parts, but we han't yet made up our minds exactly

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where to go. Mayhap you'll give us the benefit of your advice."

While he was speaking the fur-trader glanced with an earnest yet half stupid stare at the faces of the trappers, as if he wished to impress their features on his memory.

"Advice," he replied; "you're welcome to all the advice I've got to give ye; and it's this — go home; go to where you belong to, sell your traps and rifles and take to the plough, the hatchet, the forehammer — to any thing you like, so long as it keeps you out of this ——" Macgregor paused a moment as if he were about to utter an oath, then dropped his voice and said, "This wretched Indian country."

"I guess, then, that we won't take yer advice, old man," said Big Waller, with a laugh.

"'Old man?'" echoed Macgregor with a start.

"Wall, if ye beant old, ye ain't exactly a chicken."

"You're a plain-spoken man," replied the trader, biting his lips. "I always wos," retorted Waller.

Macgregor frowned for a moment, then he broke into a forced laugh and said, —

"Well, friends, you'll please yourselves, of course; most people do; and if you are so determined to stick to the wilderness, I would advise some of you to stop here. There's plenty of fun

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and fighting, if you're fond of that. What say you now, lad," turning to March, "to remain with us here at the Mountain Fort? I've ta'en a sort of fancy to your face. We want young bloods here. I'll give you a good wage and plenty to do."

"Thanks; you are kind," replied March, smiling, "but I love freedom too well to part with it yet awhile."

"Mais, monsieur," cried Gibault, pushing forward, pulling off his cap, and making a low bow; "if you vants yonger blod, an' also ver' goot blod, here am von!"

The trader laughed, and was about to reply, when a sudden burst of laughter and the sound of noisy voices in the yard interrupted him. Presently two of the men belonging to the establishment cantered out of the square, followed by all the men, women, and children of the place, amounting probably to between twenty and thirty souls. "A race! a race!" shouted the foremost.

"Hallo! Dupont, what's to do?" inquired McLeod, as the two horsemen came up.

"Please, monsieur, Lincoln have bet me von gun dat hims horse go more queek dan mine,—so we try."

"Yes, so we shall, I guess," added the man named Lincoln, whose speech told that he was a Yankee.

"Go it stranger; I calc'late you'll do him

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slick," cried Waller, patronizingly, for his heart warmed towards his countryman.

"Ah! non. Go home; put your horse to bed," cried Gibault, glancing at the Yankee's steed in contempt. "Dis is de von as vill do it more slicker by far."

"Well, well; clear the course; we shall soon see," cried McLeod. "Now then — here's the word, — one, two — away!"

At the last word the riders' whips cracked, and the horses sprang forward at a furious gallop. Both of them were good spirited animals, and during the first part of the race it could not be said that either had the advantage. They ran neck and neck together.

The race-course at the Mountain Fort was a beautiful stretch of level turf which extended a considerable distance in front of the gates. It crossed a clear open country towards the forest, where it terminated, and, sweeping round in an abrupt curve, formed, as it were, a loop; so that competitors, after passing over the course, swept round the loop, and reëntering the original course again, came back toward the fort, where a long pole formed the winning-post.

Dupont and Lincoln kept together, as we have said, for some time after starting, but before they had cleared the first half of the course the former was considerably in advance of the latter, much to the delight of most of the excited spectators,

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with whom he was a favorite. On gaining the loop above referred to, and making the graceful sweep round it, which brought the foremost rider into full side view, the distance between them became more apparent, and a cheer arose from the people near the fort-gate.

At that moment a puff of smoke issued from the bushes. Dupont tossed his arms in the air, uttered a sharp cry, and fell headlong to the ground. At the same instant a band of Indians sprang from the underwood, with an exulting yell. Lincoln succeeded in checking and turning his horse before they caught his bridle, but an arrow pierced his shoulder ere he had galloped out of reach of his enemies.

The instant Dupont fell, a savage leaped upon him, and plunged his knife into his heart. Then, passing the sharp weapon quickly round his head with his right hand, with the left he tore the scalp off, and, leaping up, shook the bloody trophy defiantly at the horrified spectators.

All this was accomplished so quickly that the horror-stricken people of the Mountain Fort had not time to move a finger to save their comrade. But, as the savage raised the scalp of poor Dupont above his head, Redhand's rifle flew to his shoulder, and in another moment the Indian fell to the earth beside his victim. Seeing this, the other Indians darted into the forest.

Then a fearful imprecation burst from the lips

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of Macgregor, as, with a face convulsed with passion, he rushed into the fort, shouting — "To horse! to horse, men! and see that your horns and pouches are full of powder and ball!"

The commotion and hubbub that now took place baffle all description. The men shouted and raved as they ran hither and thither, arming themselves and saddling their horses; while the shrieks of poor Dupont's widow mingled with those of the other women and the cries of the terrified children.

"Half a dozen of you must keep the fort," said McLeod, when they were all assembled; "the others will be sufficient to punish these fiends. You'll help us, I suppose?"

This latter question was addressed to Redhand, who, with his comrades, stood armed, and ready to mount.

"Ready, sir," answered the trapper promptly.

McLeod looked round with a gleam of satisfaction on the stalwart forms of his guests, as they stood each at his horse's head examining the state of his weapons, or securing more firmly some portion of his costume.

"Mount! mount!" shouted Macgregor, galloping at that moment through the gateway, and dashing away in the direction of the forest.

"Stay! — my sketch-book!" cried Bertram, in an agony, at the same time dropping his reins and his gun, and darting back toward the hall of the fort.

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"Git on, lads; I'll look arter him," said Bounce, with a grin, catching up the bridle of the artist's horse.

Without a moment's hesitation, the remainder of the party turned, and galloped after Macgregor, who, with the most of his own men, had already wellnigh gained the edge of the forest.

In a few seconds Bertram rushed wildly out of the fort, with the sketch-book in one hand and the two blunderbuss-pistols in the other. In leaping on his horse, he dropped the latter; but Bounce picked them up, and stuck them hastily into his own belt.

"Now put that book into its own pouch, or ye'll be fit for nothin'," said Bounce, almost sternly.

Bertram obeyed, and grasped the rifle which his friend placed in his hand. Then Bounce vaulted into his saddle, and, ere those who were left behind had drawn the bolts and let down the ponderous bars of the gate of the Mountain Fort, the two horsemen were flying at full speed over the plain in the track of the avengers of blood who had gone before them.

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CHAPTER XIII.

The Pursuit. — Conscientious Scruples of the Artist. — Strategic Movements. — Surprised in the Wild-cat Pass. — March shows Coolness and Pluck in the Hour of Danger. — A Terrific Onslaught by a Wonderful Warrior. — The Battle. — Hard Knocks and Mysterious Differences of Opinion.

CROSSING the open ground in front of the Mountain Fort, Bounce and Bertram entered the wood beyond, and traversed it with comparative ease, by means of a bridle-path which had been cut there by the fur-traders. A few minutes' gallop brought them to the other side of the wood, which was one of those narrow strips or clumps of forest which grow, more or less thickly, on the skirts of the Rocky Mountains, forming that fine picturesque region where the prairie and the forest meet and seem to contend for the mastery.

The plain beyond this bit of wood was open and level — at least, sufficiently so to enable the two horsemen to see for a considerable distance around them. Here, in the far distance they descried their companions sweeping over the turf at their utmost speed, and making toward a low hill or ridge that intercepted the view of the more distant country.

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"They'll have to draw in a bit," said Bounce, turning to his comrade. "Horses no more nor men can't go helter-skelter up a hill without takin' breath; so rouse up your beast, Mr. Bertram, an' we'll overtake 'em afore they gits to the tother side."

Bertram obeyed his friend's command, but made no rejoinder, his thoughts being too deeply engaged at that moment in a controversy with his conscience as to the propriety of the business he had then in hand.

The young artist had a deep veneration for abstract truth — truth pure and simple, not only in reference to morals, but to all things terrestrial and celestial; and he was deeply impressed with the belief, that what was right — was right, and what was wrong — was wrong, and could not, by any possibility, be otherwise. He felt, also, that the man who recognized truth, and acted upon it, *must* go right, and he who saw and did otherwise *must* go wrong!

Holding this simple creed very tenaciously, and, as we think, very properly, Bertram nevertheless found that his attempts to act up to it frequently involved him in a maze of perplexities.

On the present occasion, as he and Bounce thundered over the green turf of the flowering plains, scattering the terrified grasshoppers right and left, and causing the beautifully-striped ground-squirrels to plunge with astonishing pre-

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cipitancy into their holes, he argued with himself, that the mere fact of a murderous deed having been done was not a sufficient reason, perhaps, to justify his sallying forth with a reckless band of desperate fur-traders, bent on indiscriminate revenge. It was quite true, in his opinion, that a murderer should be punished with death, and that the pursuit and capture of a murderer was not only a legitimate act in itself, but, in the circumstances, a bounden duty on his part. Yet it was equally true that most of the men with whom he was associated were thirsty for vengeance, and from past experience he knew full well that there would be no attempt to find out the murderer, but a simple and general massacre of all the Indians whom they could overtake.

Then it suddenly occurred to him that the murderer had already been shot by Redhand, so that his mission was one of simple revenge; but, a moment after, it flashed across his troubled mind that Lincoln had been left in the fort wounded — might possibly be dead by that time; so that there were probably among the flying savages other murderers to be dealt with. This idea was strengthened by another thought, namely, that the savage who stabbed and scalped Dupont might not have been the savage who shot him. The complication and aggregate of improbability amounted, in Bertram's mind, so nearly to a certainty, that he dismissed the digressive

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question as to whether there might or might not be a murderer among the Indians, and returned to the original proposition, as to whether it was right in him to take part in a pursuit of vengeance that would very likely terminate murderously. But before he could come to any satisfactory conclusion on that point, he and Bounce found themselves suddenly in the midst of the cavalcade, which had halted on the summit of the ridge, in order to allow them to come up.

"Here we are, lads," cried Macgregor, his flushed face still blazing with wrath, which he made no effort to subdue, and his eyes red with prolonged debauchery, flashing like the eyes of a tiger, — "here we are, too late to cut off the retreat o' these detestable reptiles from the woods, but not too late to circumvent them."

The fur-trader spoke rapidly, almost breathlessly, and pointed to the band of Indians they were in pursuit of, who, observing that their pursuers had halted, also drew rein on the edge of a belt of thick forest that extended for miles into the mountains. They appeared to wait, in order to ascertain what their enemies meant to do.

"The villains," continued Macgregor, "think we've given up pursuit as hopeless, but they're mistaken — they're mistaken, as they'll find to their cost. Now, mark me, men; we shall turn back as if we had really given in; but the moment we get down into the hollow, out of sight,

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we'll go as hard as we can bolt up that valley there, and round by the place we call the Wild-cat's Pass. It's a difficult pass, but who cares for that? Once through it we can get by a short cut to the other side of that wood, and meet the Redskins right in the teeth. They're Blackfoot Indians, I know by their dress; and as they don't belong to this part o' the country, they can't be aware of the pass. But some of us must go back a good way toward the fort, so as to deceive the blackguards, who'll be sure to get on the first hill they can to see where we've gone to. Now — away! Stay," he added, in a less commanding tone, "I don't know that my guests are willing to go with us through thick an' thin in this fashion. I've no desire to have unwilling warriors."

"Had we not been *willing*," replied Redhand, drily, "we wouldn't have come even thus far."

"Very good," rejoined Macgregor, with a grim smile; "then, perhaps, since you are so good as to go along with us, you'll make for the head of that valley, and, when you come to the Wild-cat Pass I've spoken of, you'll wait there till the rest of us, who are to sham going back to the fort, come up with ye; then we'll go through the pass together, and polish off the redskins."

To this plan Redhand assented; so he and his comrades prepared to take the way to the pass, while the men of the fort turned homewards. A

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triumphant shout from the Indians showed that they imagined the pursuit was given up; but Macgregor knew their cunning too well to fall into the mistake of at once concluding that they were thoroughly deceived. He knew that they would send out scouts to dog them, and felt, that if his plan was to succeed, he must put it into execution promptly.

"I've scarce had time to ask your names or where you've come from," he said, on parting from the trappers; "but there'll be plenty of time for that when we meet again. Keep close in the bottom, and ride fast, till the shadow of yonder crag conceals you from view. If the Indians get sight of you, they'll smell the dodge at once and escape us. Perhaps, young man, you'd like to come with *my* party?"

The latter part of this speech was made rather abruptly to March Marston, who received it with some surprise, and with a distinct refusal.

"I'll stick by my comrades," said he, "till I see good reason ——"

"Well, well, boy — please yourself!" muttered the trader angrily, as he broke away at full speed, followed by his men.

Our trappers instantly turned their horses' heads toward the mountains, and made for the Wild-cat Pass.

Macgregor's estimate of the cunning of the Indians was but too correct. The instant the

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fur-traders disappeared behind the ridge, as if on their return homewards, several of their fastest riders were despatched to the nearest hill, to watch the movements of the enemy. They ascended one which commanded a wide view of the surrounding country, and thence beheld the fur-traders proceeding swiftly back in the direction of the fort. Unfortunately, they also perceived the bottle-brush of Bertram's steed, as it disappeared behind the crag which already concealed the rest of his comrades from view. One instant later and the Indians would have failed to make this discovery, for a deep impassable gorge lay between them and the ravine which conducted to the pass. It was but the barest possible glimpse they got of that shabby tail; but it told a tale which they perfectly understood, for they flew back in the utmost haste to warn their comrades, who, knowing the smallness of the party thus sent against them, from the largeness of the party that had shammed returning to the fort, resolved upon executing a counter movement.

They had a shrewd suspicion, from the nature of the country, that the intention of the whites was to get through a pass of some sort and intercept them, and, concluding that this pass must lie at the head of the valley up which the bottle-brush had vanished, they resolved to proceed to the same spot through the gorge that

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separated the hill from the crag or rocky ridge before referred to.

Promptitude they knew to be every thing, so they swept up the gorge like a whirlwind. Thus both parties drew nearer to the chaotic opening styled the Wild-cat Pass, — the trappers, all ignorant of what awaited them there; the savages, bent on giving their enemies an unpleasant surprise.

But, unknown to either, there was a pair of eyes high on a rock above the Wild-cat Pass, — that overlooked the two valleys or ravines, and gazed with considerable interest and curiosity on the two advancing parties. Those eyes belonged to a solitary horseman, who stood on the edge of the wild precipice that overhung the pass. The hunter, for such his leathern dress bespoke him, stood beside his horse, his right arm over its arched neck, and his right hand patting its sleek shoulder. From the position which he occupied he could see without being seen. His magnificent steed seemed to be aware that danger was at hand, for it stood like a statue, absolutely motionless, with the exception of its fine fiery eyes. Whatever this solitary hunter's thoughts regarding the two approaching parties might be, it was evident that he meant to remain an invisible spectator of their doings; for he stood in the same attitude of statue-like attention until they reached the heads of the two ravines, where they

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were separated from each other only by the pass. Here, on the one side, the Indians, about forty in number, lay in ambush among the rocks, prepared to surprise and attack the trappers when they should pass. On the other side the trappers halted, and, dismounting, allowed their horses to graze, while they awaited the arrival of Macgregor and his party.

"They won't be long o' comin'," remarked Redhand, seating himself on a stone and proceeding to strike a light. "That fellow, Macgregor, an't the man to waste time when he's out after the redskins. I only hope he won't waste life when he gets up to them."

"So do I," said Bounce, seating himself beside Redhand, and carefully cutting a small piece of tobacco into shreds by means of a scalping-knife. "A sartin amount o' punishment is needful, d'ye see, to keep 'em down; but I don't like slaughterin' human bein's onnecessary like."

"I'd skiver 'em all, I guess — every one," observed Big Waller angrily. "They're a murderin', thievin' set o' varmints, as don't desarve to live nohow!"

"Bah!" exclaimed Gibault in disgust; "you is most awferfully onfeelosophicule, as Bounce do say. If dey not fit for live, for fat vas dey made? You vicked man!"

Big Waller deigned no reply.

"I'm off to look at the pass," cried March

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Marston, vaulting suddenly into the saddle. "Come, Bertram; you'll go with me, won't you, and see if we can find some wild cats in it?"

The artist, who had not dismounted, merely replied by a nod and a smile, and the two reckless youths galloped away, heedless of Bounce's warning not to go too far, for fear they should find something worse than wild cats there.

The Wild-cat Pass, through which they were speedily picking their steps, in order to get a view of the country beyond, was not inappropriately named; for it seemed at the first glance of those who entered it, as if no creature less savagely reckless than a wild cat could, by any possibility, scramble through it without the aid of wings.

The greater part of it was the ancient bed of a mountain torrent, whose gushing waters had, owing to some antediluvian convulsion of nature, been diverted into another channel. The whole scene was an absolute chaos of rocks which had fallen into the torrent's bed from the precipice that hemmed it in on the west, and these rocky masses lay heaped about in such a confused way, that it was extremely difficult to select a pathway along which the horses could proceed without running great risk of breaking their limbs. The entire length of the pass could not have been much more than a quarter of a mile, yet it took

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March Marston and his companion full half an hour to traverse it.

When about half through the pass, March, who led the way, drew up on a small rocky elevation, from which he could survey the amphitheatre of rugged and naked rocks in the midst of which he stood.

"Upon my word, Bertram," he said, gazing round, "if Bunyan had ever been in the Rocky Mountains, I think he would have chosen such a spot as this for the castle o' Giant Despair."

"I know not," replied Bertram with a deep sigh, as he drew rein, "what Bunyan would have done, but I know that Giant Despair has already located himself here, for he has been trying to take possession of my bosom for at least twenty minutes. I never rode over such ground in my life. However, it ill becomes pioneers to be overcome by such a giant, so pray push on; I feel quite eager to see what sort of region lies beyond this gloomy portal."

March laughed and turned to continue the scramble; Bertram removed his brigandish hat, wiped his heated brows, replaced the hat firmly thereon, and drove his heels violently against the ribs of his horse, an act which induced that patient quadruped to toss its head and shake its bottle-brush ere it condescended to move on. It was quite evident that, although Bertram spoke in a half jesting tone of Giant Despair, he was

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in reality much delighted with the singularity of this extemporized and interesting ramble.

"I say, Bertram, don't you like this sort o' thing?" inquired March, looking back at his companion, on reaching a somewhat level part of the pass.

"Like it? Ay, that do I. I love it, March. There is a freedom, a species of wild romance about it, that is more captivating than I can describe."

"You don't need to describe it," returned March," I have it all described splendidly within me. One don't want words when one's got feelins. But I've often thought what a pity it is that we can't describe things or places at all with words. At least, *I* cant," he added modestly. "When I try to tell a fellow what I've seen, it ain't o' no manner of use to try, for I don't get hold of the right words at the right time, and so don't give out the right meanin', and so the fellow I'm speakin' to don't take up the right notion, d'ye see? It's a great pity that words are such useless things."

"Why, that was spoken like Bounce himself," said Bertram, smiling.

"Look out, or you'll go bounce into that hole, if you don't have a care," cried March, turning aside to avoid the danger referred to. They proceeded through the remainder of the pass in silence, as the rugged nature of the ground required their undivided attention.

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Had there been a sprite in that place, who could have hopped invisibly to some elevated pinnacle, or have soared on gossamer wings to the air, so as to take in a bird's eye view of the whole scene, he would have noted that while March Marston and the artist were toiling slowly through the Wild-cat Pass, the solitary hunter before referred to regarded their proceedings with some surprise, and that when he saw they were bent on going quite through the pass, his expression changed to a look of deep concern.

With slow and gentle hand this man backed his quiet and docile horse deeper into the bush; and when he had got so deep into the shade of the forest, as to be perfectly safe from observation, he leaped on its back with a single bound, and galloped swiftly away.

A few minutes after the occurrence of this incident, March and his friend emerged from the pass and trotted out upon a level plain whence they obtained a fine view of the magnificent country beyond. The pass from which they had just issued seemed to be the entrance to the heart of the Rocky Mountains. The plain, or rather the plateau, on which they stood, was a level spot covered with soft grass, free from bushes, and not more than a hundred yards in extent. On three sides it was encompassed by inaccessible precipices and rocky ground, in the midst of which the opening out of the pass was situated. On

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the fourth side it was skirted by a dense thicket of bushes that formed the entrance to a magnificent forest which extended for several miles in front of the spot. Beyond this forest the scene was broken by hills and valleys, and little plains, richly diversified with wood and water — the former in dense masses, scattered groups and isolated clusters; the latter shining in the forms of lakelet and stream, or glancing snow-white in numberless cascades. Beyond all, the dark blue giant masses of the Rocky Mountains towered up and up, hill upon hill, pile upon pile, mass on mass, till they terminated in distant peaks, so little darker than the sky that they seemed scarcely more solid than the clouds with which they mingled and blended their everlasting snows.

"An't it beautiful?" cried March, riding forward with a bounding sensation of inexpressible delight.

Bertram followed him, but did not answer. He was too deeply absorbed in the simple act of intently gazing and drinking in the scene to listen or to reply.

At the precise moment in which March made the above remark, his quick eye observed a spear-head which one of the savages, hid among the bushes there, had not taken sufficient pains to conceal.

March Marston was a young hunter, and, as

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yet, an inexperienced warrior; but from childhood he had been trained, as it were, in spirit, by the anecdotes and tales of the many hunters who had visited Pine Point settlement. His natural powers of self-control were very great, but he had to tax all these powers to the uttermost to maintain his look of animated delight in the scenery unchanged, after making the above startling discovery. But March did it! His first severe trial in the perils of backwood life had come — without warning or time for preparation; and he passed through the ordeal like a true hero.

That a spear-handle must necessarily support a spear-head; that an Indian probably grasped the former; that, in the present position of affairs, there were certainly more Indians than one in ambush; and that, in all probability, there were at that moment two or three dozen arrows resting on their respective bows, and pointed toward his and his comrade's hearts, ready to take flight the instant they should come within sure and deadly range, were ideas which did not follow each other in rapid succession through his brain, but darted upon the young hunter's quick perceptions instantaneously, and caused his heart to beat on his ribs like a sledge-hammer, and the blood to fly violently to his face.

Luckily March's face was deeply browned, and did not show the crimson tide. With a sudden, mighty effort he checked the natural look

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and exclamation of surprise. That was the moment of danger past. To continue his praise of the lovely scene in gay delighted tones was comparatively easy.

"Isn't it beautiful?" he said, turning his face fully toward the ambushed savages, gazing over their place of concealment with an unconscious joyous air, and sweeping his hand toward the mountains, as if to draw the attention of his companion to them. March's only weapon at that moment was the small hatchet he was wont to carry in his girdle. This implement chanced to be in his hand. Placing it carelessly in his belt, as though nothing was further from his mind than the idea of requiring to use it at that time, he cried,—

"See, yonder is a mound from which we may get a better view," and trotted to the summit of the spot alluded to. In doing so he placed himself still nearer to the Indians. This was a bold stroke, though a dangerous one, meant to deceive the enemy. After gazing a few seconds from this spot, he wheeled round and walked his horse quietly toward the entrance to the pass. Arrived there, he turned, and pretending that he saw something in the far distance, he shaded his eyes with his hand and gazed for a short time intently, then calling to Bertram, who still remained in his original position all unconscious of his danger said:—

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"I say, come here; look at yonder splendid lake, it's worth seeing, — *well* worth seeing; and if you don't see it with that *curious light* on it, you'll not care to see it at all."

March did not dare, by energy of voice, to force his friend's attention, therefore the first part of this speech was unheeded; but the reference to a "curious light" had the desired effect. Bertram turned, and rode to join his companion. Getting Bertram into such a position that his own person partially screened him from the Indians, he made the following remarkable speech, from beginning to end, in the gay tones of one who discourses eloquently on the beauties of nature; pointing here and there as he rattled on.

"An't it beautiful? eh! I say, just look at it now! — listen to me, Bertram — attentively, but gaze admiringly at the scene — *at the scene* — oh! man, *do* what I bid ye — your life hangs on it. *Pretend* to admire it — we're in great danger — but ——"

"Eh! what! where?" exclaimed the artist in a tone of intense excitement, at the same time laying his hand on one of his pistols and gazing anxiously all round him.

Alas! poor Bertram. It needed not the acute apprehension of a redskin to understand that you had been told of present danger. Neither did it require much acuteness on the part of March to divine what was to follow.

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Scarcely had the symptoms of alarm been exhibited, when four arrows whizzed through the air and passed close to the persons of the two friends, who instantly turned and made a dash for the entrance of the pass. At the same time the savages uttered a yell and darted after them.

"We'll never be able to escape by the pass," exclaimed March, looking behind him hurriedly, as they approached the rocky gorge, "and, I declare, there's only four o' them on foot. Come, Bertram, let's make a bold stroke for it. We'll easy break through 'em."

He reined up so suddenly as almost to throw the horse on its haunches, and, wheeling round, darted toward the savages. Bertram followed, almost mechanically.

The Indians offered no opposition, but at that moment another yell rose from the bushes, and about thirty mounted Indians, who had been concealed behind a projecting cliff, sprang forward and closed up the only place of escape with a formidable array of spears. From their not using their arrows it was evident that they wished to capture the white men alive, for the purpose, no doubt, of taking them home to their wigwams, there to put them to death by slow torture with the assistance of their squaws.

March Marston's spirit rose with the occasion. He uttered a furious cry, flourished his hatchet above his head, and dashed at full gallop toward

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the line. Seeing this, one of the Indians levelled his spear and rode out to meet him. Bertram's nerves recovered at that moment. He fired both pistols at the advancing savage, but without effect. In despair he hurled one of them violently at the head of the Indian. The missile went true to the mark and felled him. On beholding this the whole body of savages rushed upon the two white men.

One powerful Indian seized March by the throat. Before either could use his weapon the horses separated and both fell violently to the ground. Bertram leaped off his horse and sprang to the rescue, but he was instantly surrounded, and for a few seconds defended himself with the butt of his large cavalry pistol with an amount of energy and activity that would have filled those who knew him best with amazement. At that moment there was a clatter of hoofs in the gorge, and a roar or bellow was heard above the din of the fight. All eyes were turned toward the pass, and next moment a solitary horseman leaped over the broken rocks and bounded over the turf toward the combatants.

The aspect of this new comer was something terrible to behold. Both he and his horse were gigantic in size. The man was dressed in the costume of an Indian, but his hair and beard were those of a white man. The mane and tail of his huge horse were of enormous length, and as he

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swept over the little plain, which seemed to tremble beneath his heavy tread, the wind blew out these and the tags and scalplocks of his coat and leggings as well as his own beard and hair in such a confused and commingled way as to make the man and horse appear like one monstrous creature.

The Indians turned to flee, but, seeing only one enemy, they hesitated. In another moment the wild horseman was upon them. He carried a round shield on his left arm and a long double-edged sword in his right hand. Two Indians lowered their spears to receive him. The point of one he turned aside with his shield, and the shock of his heavy war-horse hurled horse and man upon the plain. The other he cut the iron head off with a swoop of his sword, and, with a continuation of the same cut, he cleft his opponent to the chin. Turning rapidly, he bounded into the very midst of the savages, uttering another of his tremendous roars of indignation. The suddenness of this act prevented the Indians from using their bows and arrows effectively. Before they could fit an arrow to the string two more of their number lay in the agonies of death on the ground. Several arrows were discharged, but the perturbation of those who discharged them, and their close proximity to their mark, caused them to shoot wide. Most of the shafts missed him. Two quivered in his shield, and one pierced the sleeve

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of his coat. Turning again to renew his rapid attacks he observed one of the Indians — probably a chief — leap to one side, and turning round, fit an arrow with calm deliberation to his bow. The furious horseman, although delivering his sweeping blows right and left with indiscriminate recklessness, seemed during the *mêlée* to have an intuitive perception of where the greatest danger lay. The savages at that moment were whirling round him and darting at him in all directions, but he singled out this chief at once and bore down upon him like a thunderbolt. The chief was a brave man. He did not wince, but, drawing the arrow to his head as the other approached, let it fly full at his breast. The white man dropped on the neck of his steed as if he had been struck with lightning; the arrow passed close over his back and found its mark in the breast of one of the savages, whose death-yell mingled with that of the chief as, a moment later, the gigantic warrior ran him with a straight point through the body.

The Indians were scattered now. The rapid dash of that tumultuous fight, although of but a few seconds' duration, had swept the combatants to the extreme edge of the woods, leaving Bertram standing in the midst of dead and dying men gazing with a bewildered, helpless look at the terrible scene. March Marston lay close by his side, apparently dead, in the gripe of the

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savage who had first attacked him, and whose throat his own hand grasped with the tenacity and force of a vice.

Most of the Indians leaped over the bushes and sought the shelter of the thick underwood, as the tremendous horseman, whom doubtless they now deemed invulnerable, came thundering down upon them again; but about twenty of the bravest stood their ground. At that moment a loud shout and a fierce "hurrah!" rang out and echoed hither and thither among the rocks; and, next instant, Big Waller, followed by Bounce and his friends, as well as by Macgregor and his whole party, sprang from the Wild-cat Pass, and rushed furiously upon the savages, who had already turned and fled toward the wood for shelter. The whole band crossed the battle-field like a whirlwind, leaped over or burst through the bushes, and were gone, — the crashing tread of their footsteps and an occasional shout alone remaining to assure the bewildered artist, who was still transfixed immovable to the ground, that the whole scene was not a dream.

But Bertram was not left alone on that bloody field. On the first sound of the approach of the white men to the rescue, the strange horseman, — who, from the moment of his bursting so opportunely on the scene, had seemed the very impersonation of activity and colossal might, — pulled up his fiery steed; and he now sat, gazing

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calmly into the forest in the direction in which the Indians and traders had disappeared.

Stupefied though he was, Bertram could not avoid being impressed and surprised by the sudden and total change which had come over this remarkable hunter. After gazing into the woods, as we have said, for some minutes, he quietly dismounted, and plucking a tuft of grass from the plain, wiped his bloody sword, and sheathed it. Not a trace of his late ferocity was visible. His mind seemed to be filled with sadness, for he sighed slightly and shook his head with a look of deep sorrow, as his eyes rested on the dead men. There was a mild gravity in his countenance that seemed to Bertram incompatible with the fiend-like fury of his attack, and a slow heaviness in his motions that amounted almost to laziness, and seemed equally inconsistent with the vigor he had so recently displayed, which was almost cat-like, if we may apply such a term to the actions of so huge a pair as this man and his horse were.

A profusion of light brown hair hung in heavy masses over his Herculean shoulders, and a bushy moustache and beard of the same color covered the lower part of his deeply browned face, which was handsome and mild, but eminently masculine, in expression.

Remounting his horse, which seemed now to be as quiet and peaceable as himself, this singular

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being turned and rode toward that part of the wood that lay nearest to the wild rocky masses that formed the outlet from the pass. On gaining the verge of the plain he turned his head full round, and fixed his clear blue eyes on the wondering artist. A quiet smile played on his bronzed features for an instant, as he bestowed upon him a cheerful nod of farewell. Then, urging his steed forward, he entered the woods at a slow walk, and disappeared.

The heavy tramp of his horse's hoofs among the broken stones of the rugged path had scarcely died away, when the distant tread of the returning fur-traders broke on Bertram's ear. This aroused him from the state of half-sceptical horror in which he gazed upon the scene of blood and death in the midst of which he stood. Presently his eye fell, for the first time, upon the motionless form of March-Marston. The sight effectually restored him. With a slight cry of alarm, he sprang to his friend's side, and, kneeling down, endeavored to loosen the death-like grasp with which he still held the throat of his foe. The horror of the poor artist may be imagined, when he observed that the skull of the Indian was battered in, and that his young comrade's face was bespattered with blood and brains.

Just then several of the trappers and fur-traders galloped upon the scene of the late skirmish.

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"Hallo! Mr. Bertram, here you are; guess we've polished 'em off this time a few. Hey! wot's this?" cried Big Waller, as he and some the others leaped to the ground and surrounded Bertram. "Not *dead*, is he?"

The tone in which the Yankee trapper said this betrayed as much rage as regret. The bare idea of his young comrade having been killed by the savages caused him to gnash his teeth with suppressed passion.

"Out o' the way, lads; let me see him," cried Bounce, who galloped up at that moment, flung himself off his horse, pushed the others aside, and kneeling at his side, laid his hand on March Marston's heart.

"All right," he said, raising the youth's head, "he's only stunned. Run, Gibault, fetch a drop o' water. The horse that brained this here redskin, by good luck, only stunned March."

"Ah! mon pauvre enfant!" cried Gibault, as he ran to obey.

The water quickly restored March, and in a few minutes he was able to sit up and call to remembrance what had passed. Ere his scattered faculties were quite recovered, the fur-traders returned, with Macgregor at their head.

"Well done, the Wild Man of the West!" cried McLeod, as he dismounted. "Not badly hurt, young man, I trust."

"Oh! nothing to speak of. Only a thump on

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the head from a horse's hoof," said March; "I'll be all right in a little time. Did you say any thing about the Wild Man of the West?" he added earnestly.

"To be sure I did; but for him you and Mr. Bertram would have been dead men, I fear. Did you not see him?"

"See him? no," replied March, much excited. "I heard a tremendous roar, but just then I fell to the ground, and remember nothing more that happened."

"Was that quiet grave-looking man the Wild Man of the West?" inquired Bertram, with a mingled feeling of interest and surprise.

This speech was received with a loud burst of laughter from all who heard it.

"Well, I've never seed the Wild Man till to-day," said one, "though I've often heer'd of him, but I must say the little glimpse I got didn't show much that was mild or grave."

"I guess your head's bin in a swum, stranger," said another, "I've only seed him this once, but I don't hope to see him agin. He ain't to be trusted, he ain't, that feller."

"And I've seen him five or six times," added McLeod, "and all I can say is, that twice out o' the five he was like an incarnate fiend, and the other three times — when he came to the Mountain Fort for ammunition — he was as gruff and sulky as a bear with the measles."

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"Well, gentlemen," said Bertram, with more emphasis in his tone than he was wont to employ, "I have seen this man only once, but I've seen him under two aspects to-day, and all that I can say is, that if that was really the Wild Man of the West, he's not quite so wild as he gets credit for."

On hearing this, March Marston rose and shook himself. He felt ill at ease in body and mind. The idea of the Wild Man of the West having actually saved his life, and he not seen him, was a heavy disappointment, and the confused and conflicting accounts of those who had seen him, combined with the racking pains that shot through his own brain, rendered him incapable of forming or expressing any opinion on the subject whatever; so he said, abruptly:—

"It's of no use talking here all night, friends. My head's splittin', so I think we'd better encamp."

March's suggestion was adopted at once. Provisions had been carried with them from the fort. The dead bodies of the Indians were buried; a spot at some distance from the scene of the fight was chosen. The fires were lighted, supper was devoured and a watch set, and soon March Marston was dreaming wildly in that savage place about the Wild Man of the West!

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CHAPTER XIV.

The Hunting-ground. — How they spent the Sabbath Day among the Mountains. — Threatening Clouds on the Horizon.

NEXT day the fur-traders prepared to return to the Mountain Fort, and the trappers to continue their journey into the Rocky Mountains.

At the period of which we write, the fur of the beaver was much in demand in the European markets, and trappers devoted much of their time to the capture of that sagacious animal. From McLeod, Redhand learned that a journey of eight or ten days to the south-eastward would bring them to a country that was reported to be much frequented not only by the beaver, but by many other fur-bearing and wild animals; so it was resolved that, having brought their traps and supplies with them, the trappers, instead of returning to the fort, should part with their entertainers at the spot where the skirmish had occurred, and make for that hunting-ground as quickly as possible.

"I suppose you don't want to part company with us yet, Mr. Bertram," said old Redhand, as they were about to start.

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"By no means," replied the artist quickly, "I have no intention of quitting you — that is, if you do not find me a burden on your hands;" he added with a sad smile.

"A burden!" cried Bounce in surprise, "I tell ye wot, sir, I consider yer company a honor."

"So you won't return with us, young man?" said Macgregor to March Marston, as he mounted his horse, "I'm in want of a stout young fellow, and you'll like the life."

"I thank ye, sir, for your good opinion," returned March, "but my mind's made up, I'll stick by my comrades; I like trappin', but I don't like tradin' — though I'm obliged to you for bein' so pressin' all the same."

The two parties bade each other adieu and separated — the one retracing its way through the Wild-cat Pass; the other, with old Redhand at its head, descending into the beautiful country that has been briefly described in the last chapter.

Six quiet and peaceful weeks now succeeded to the stormy period that had just passed. During this time they wandered pleasantly about in as beautiful a region of the world as the heart of man could wish to dwell in. They reached this country after several days' travel. After arriving they moved about from one beautiful spot to another, setting their beaver-traps in the streams, and remaining a longer or shorter time at each place, according to their success in trapping and hunting.

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The country was of so peculiarly diversified a formation, that, within the compass of ten miles, every possible variety of scenery existed, — from the level stretch of prairie to the towering snow-peaks of the mountains; from the brake-encompassed swamp, in which the frogs, ducks, geese, plover, and other denizens of the marshes maintained perpetual jubilee, to the dry bush-dotted mounds and undulating lands, where the badger delighted to burrow in the sandy soil, while in other places, the wolf, the fox, and the grisly bear prowled amid the dark recesses of the forest.

It was a truly beautiful and a preëminently enjoyable region, and, in the midst of it, under the spreading branches of a magnificent pine, which grew on the top of a little mound that commanded an extensive prospect on every side, the trappers pitched their camp, and began their campaign against the fur-bearing animals that dwelt there.

It was a quiet sunny Sabbath morning when our trappers arrived at the tree above referred to. They had encamped the previous night on a swampy piece of ground, having travelled too late to afford time to search for a better spot, so that they were glad to rise and push forward at the peep of day on Sabbath. But when, in the course of a couple of hours, they reached the dry country, they at once proceeded to encamp.

During their journeying the trappers had

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mutually agreed to rest from all labor on the Sabbath day. Some of them did so from no higher motive than the feeling that it was good for themselves and for their beasts to rest one day in seven from bodily labor. Although not absolutely regardless of religion, they nevertheless failed to connect this necessity of theirs with the appointment of a day of rest by that kind and gracious Father, who has told us that "the Sabbath was made for man." Made for him not only, and chiefly, for the benefit of his soul, but also, and secondarily, for the good of his body.

Others of the party there were, however, who regarded the Sabbath rest in a somewhat higher light than did their comrades; though none of them were fully alive to the blessings and privileges attaching to the faithful keeping of the Lord's Day. Independently altogether of the delight connected with the contemplation of the wonderful works of God in the wilderness—especially of that beautiful portion of the wilderness—the trappers experienced a sensation of intense pleasure in the simple act of physical repose after their long, restless, and somewhat exciting journey. They wandered about from spot to spot, from hill to hill, in a species of charming indolence of body, that seemed to increase, rather than to diminish, the activity of their minds. Sometimes they rambled or rested on the sunny slopes in groups, sometimes in couples, and sometimes singly.

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March Marston and the artist sauntered about together, and conversed with animated fluency and wandering volubility — as young minds are wont to do — on things past, present, and to come; things terrestrial and celestial. In short, there was no subject, almost, that did not get a share of their attention, as they sauntered by the rippling brook or over the flowering plain, or stood upon the mountain side. They tried "every thing by turns, and nothing long," and, among other mental occupations, they read portions of the Bible together; for Bertram found that March carried his mother's Testament in an inner breast-pocket of his hunting-shirt, and March discovered that his friend had a small copy of the Bible — also a mother's gift — which shared the pouch of his leather coat with the well-known sketch-book. They conversed freely and somewhat boldly on what they read, and we doubt not that our learned divines, had they listened to the talk of the youthful pioneer and the young hunter, would have been surprised, perhaps edified, by the simple, practical, common-sense views promulgated by those raw theologians. Certainly, any one listening to the grave, kindly, philosophical commentary of March Marston, would never have believed in the truth of that statement at the commencement of this story, wherein it is asserted somewhat positively that "March Marston was mad!"

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Bounce, and Big Waller, and Black Gibault, drew naturally together and speculated, after their own peculiar fashion, on every subject of thought within the reach of their capacities; and as Bounce's capacities embraced a pretty wide range, the "feelosophical" views he set forth upon that lovely Sabbath day were so varied, so eccentric, so graphic, and so apparently inexhaustible, that he effectually quelled Gibault's inveterate tendency to jest, and filled Big Waller with deeper admiration than ever.

As for Redhand and the Indian, they wandered about in sympathetic silence, broken ever and anon by the old trapper passing a remark on some interesting peculiarity of a leaf, an insect, or a flower. It has been said, that as men grow older they find deeper pleasure in the contemplation of the minute things of nature, and are less desirous than they were wont to expatiate on the striking and the grand. What truth there is in the remark we cannot tell; but, certain it is, while the younger men of the party seemed to cast longing, admiring, and gladsome looks over the distant landscape, and up at the snow and cloud-encompassed heights of the Rocky Mountains, old Redhand bent his eyes, we might almost say lovingly, on the earth. He would sit down on a stone, and pluck a leaf, which he would examine with minute care; or watch with the deepest interest the frantic efforts of a little ant, as it

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staggered along under its gigantic burden of a single seed, climbing over a mountainous twig, tumbling into a cavernous hole the size of a hazel-nut, or being brought to a hesitating pause by a mountain-torrent a quarter of an inch broad.

The sedate Indian took special pleasure in watching the doings of his old friend. Usually, he contented himself with a grunt of assent when Redhand made a remark on the peculiarities of a plant or an insect, but sometimes he ventured on a brief observation, and occasionally even proposed a question to his aged companion, which Redhand found it difficult to answer. There was little interchange of thought between those two silent men, but there was much of quiet enjoyment.

So passed the Sabbath day. Early on the following morning the trappers were astir, and before the sun tinged the mountain-peaks, their beaver-traps were set, an extensive portion of the territory they had thus quietly taken possession of had been explored in several directions, a couple of deer had been shot, a mountain-goat seen, and a grisly bear driven from his den and pursued, but not killed; besides a number of wild fowl having been bagged, and an immense number of creatures, including mustangs, or wild horses, roused from their lairs.

When the scattered hunters returned to the camp to breakfast, they found themselves in a satisfied, happy state of mind, with a strong disposition, on the part of some, to break their fast

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without wasting time in cooking the viands. "It was of no manner of use cooking," Big Waller said, "when a feller was fit to eat his own head off of his own shoulders!" as for Gibault, he declared that he meant to give up cooking his victuals from that time forward, and eat them raw. The others seemed practically to have come to the same conclusion, for certain it is, that the breakfast, when devoured on that first Monday morning, was decidedly underdone, — to use a mild expression!

But it was when the pipes were lighted that the peculiarities and capabilities of that wild region became fully known, for then it was that each hunter began to relate with minute accuracy the adventures of that morning. As they had scattered far and wide, and hunted or trapped separately, each had something new and more or less interesting to tell. March told of how he had shot a gray goose, and had gone into a moving swamp after it, and had sunk up to the middle, and all but took to swimming to save himself, but had got hold of the goose, notwithstanding, as the drumstick he had just picked would testify. Bounce told of having gone after a moose-deer, and, failing to come up with it, was fain to content himself with a bighorn and a buck; and Big Waller asserted that he had suddenly come upon a grisly bear, which he would certainly have shot, had it not run away

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from him. Whereupon Gibault, wilfully misunderstanding, said, with a look of unutterable surprise, that he would never have believed it — no, never — had anybody else told him, that Big Waller had actually run away from a bear! He couldn't bear to hear of it, and would not believe it though Waller himself said it. As for Bertram, having filled the pages of his sketch-book, back and front, he was compelled to take to miniature drawing in corners and blank bits, and in this way began to book the entire region, and to revel in his loved art.

Several weeks passed away, and during that time of peace and plenty, our trappers had it all to themselves. They caught and killed numbers of animals; stripped off, dried, and packed quantities of valuable furs; ate enormous meals, with the gusto of men who had laboriously earned the right to do so, and related stories and anecdotes enough to fill a huge volume. In short, they enjoyed themselves beyond conception, and Bertram agreed with March Marston in thinking that Bunyan's land of Beulah could not have surpassed that delightful region.

But one day there came a small cloud on their blue sky of felicity. An event occurred which rudely dispelled their pleasant dreams, filled their hearts with anxiety, and finally broke up their camp in a way that led to disastrous, though not altogether ruinous, consequences.

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CHAPTER XV.

Business unpleasantly Interrupted. — The Mountain Fort in Danger. — Trappers to the Rescue. — A Rude Meeting with Foes in the Dark. — A Wild Race. — March meets with a Severe Misfortune.

ONE morning, just as the trappers were dropping into camp about the usual breakfast hour, laden with the produce of the trap and the chase, they were startled by the sudden appearance of a large band of mounted Indians, who galloped to the top of a neighboring mound, and, crowding together, stood still to gaze upon the invaders of their hunting-grounds, for such they deemed the trappers, no doubt.

To snatch up their arms and run to a place of safety, was the work of a moment. It must not be supposed that such experienced men as Red-hand and Bounce were altogether unprepared for a surprise of this sort. On the day of their arrival at the hunting-ground, their first care had been to select such a place for their camp as lay in close proximity to some natural stronghold. Not ten paces from the camp-fire there was a sort of hollow in the ground, on the very summit of the mound on which they were encamped. Here all their valuables had been placed, and round the

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edge of the hole a rude breast-work had been raised, so that the party, when in it, could fire through little openings in the breast-work without exposing themselves to view.

To this fortress they retired, the instant the Indians made their appearance. Fortunately all the members of the little party had come in.

"They're holdin' a council o' war," said Bounce, carefully examining the priming of his piece. "It's as like as not they'll attack us, but they'll git a hearty, and an oncommonly warm, welcome."

"They'll not attack us," said Redhand. "They know that white men never travel without plenty of powder and ball, and they don't like taking a place by storm."

"Ay," remarked Waller, sarcastically, "'cause they knows that the first man as comes on is sartin sure to fall, an' they knows that they can't come on without somebody comin' first.

"But there's brave fellers among the redskins," rejoined Bounce, "I knowed a set o' young fellers as banded thirselves together, and swore they'd go through fire an' water, thick an' thin, but they'd niver turn back from the face o' danger wherever they met it. So, one day they wos crossin' a river on the ice, and the first on 'em fell in, an' wos carried away by the current, an' what does the second do, but he walks straight into the hole, an' wos drowned too, an'

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the nixt wos goin' to foller, when the old warriors ran at him an' forced him back. If they hadn't stopped him, I do b'lieve ——"

"They're makin' up their minds to do somethin' or other," interrupted March.

"I sincerely hope they won't fight," murmured Bertram, earnestly. "It is fearful to think of the blood that is shed by these men needlessly."

From the conduct of the Indians it became evident that on this occasion they sympathized with the artist in his desire not to fight, for one of their number dismounted, and, advancing unarmed toward the trappers, made signs of friendship.

"It's as well to be bold an' appear to trust 'em," said Redhand, laying down his rifle and leaping over the breast-work, "keep your guns ready, lads, an' if ye see treachery, let drive at once. Don't be afraid o' hittin' me. I'll take my chance."

After a few minutes' conversation with the Indian, Redhand returned to his party.

"That redskin," said he, "tells me they're on an expedition to hunt the buffalo on the prairie, and that they're good friends of the white men, and would like to have a talk with us before they go on; but I don't believe 'em. From what I heard Mr. McLeod say at the Mountain Fort, I think it not unlikely they are bound on an expedition against the whites. The very fact of their

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wishin' to keep friends with us instead of tryin' to lift our scalps and carry off our furs and horses, shows me that they've some more pressin' business on hand. Mr. McLeod described to me the appearance of one or two o' the Injuns that hates the fur-traders most, so that I might be on my guard, an' I'm quite sure of some of them are with that band. Now, what say ye? Shall I tell 'em we don't want ther acquaintance?"

"Tell 'em they're a set o' lyin' thieves," said Big Waller; "I guess we'll have nothin' to say to 'em wotiver."

"Oui, et give to dem mine complements," added Gibault, "an' say we ver' moch 'blige by dere goodness, mais, dey vill all be shooted if dey not go away queek."

Redhand did not give these polite messages to the Indian, but on returning to him he presented him with a piece of tobacco, and advised him to continue his journey without loss of time, as the buffaloes were travelling south and might be out of the way when they reached the prairie.

Whether the Indians felt angry or not it is impossible to say. They seemed indifferent to their cool reception by the trappers, and soon after rode off at full speed, in a direction that led *away* from the Mountain Fort — a circumstance which still further confirmed Redhand in his suspicions.

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After an eager, hasty consultation, it was resolved that they should follow the savages, and if their trail was found to diverge, as was fully expected, toward the fort, that they should endeavor to pass them in the night, and proceed by forced marches, in order to get there in time to warn the fur-traders of the impending danger.

In less than an hour after the Indians left them, the trappers were galloping after them in hot haste. During the course of the day they found that the trail doubled back, as they had anticipated, so, making a wide detour, they headed the Indians, and during the afternoon got a little in advance of them on their way to the Mountain Fort.

But the trappers had a subtle enemy to deal with. Just as the Indians were about to encamp that night for a few hours' rest, they chanced to diverge a short way from the direct line of march, and, in doing so, crossed the tracks of the trappers. A halt was called, and a minute inspection of the tracks made. One of the savages galloped back on them a considerable distance, and soon returned with the information that they led toward the camp of the pale-faces. From the appearance of the hoof-prints they knew that they were fresh, and, thus, at once guessed that their true intentions had been suspected, and might yet be frustrated by the trappers. Instead of encamping, therefore,

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they pushed on at full speed and very soon came up with the white men. It was a dark night, so that they could not see far in advance of them, and thus it happened that the two parties, on entering a narrow defile, almost rode into each other, with a yell of fierce surprise on both sides.

As there were at least fifty Indians, Redhand thought it better to avoid a doubtful combat by scattering his men through the woods, and letting each make the best of his way to the fort singly.

"Run, boys! scatter! to the fort!"

This was all that was deemed needful in the way of command or explanation. Firing a single volley at the enemy, they turned and fled.

"Foller me," shouted Waller to the bewildered Bertram, as a shower of arrows whistled past their ears. The artist obeyed mechanically, and in another moment they were flying through the wood at a pace that seemed, and actually was, reckless under the circumstances. But the Indians did not attempt to pursue. They knew that their intention had been discovered, and that their only chance of success now lay in outriding the pale-faces. The ride, in fact, became a long race; neither party making the slightest attempt to hunt up the other, but each straining every nerve and muscle to get first to the doomed fort.

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The scattered trappers rode for a long time singly, but as they neared the fort, one or two of them met, and when they first came in sight of the tall flagstaff, Bounce, Redhand, and Gibault, rode abreast.

McLeod was standing in front of the fort when the three horsemen came dashing over the plain. He hastily summoned the men and closed the gate, but as the foremost rider came near, he was recognized; the gate was thrown open, and they galloped into the square. In a few hasty words their errand was explained. Arms and ammunition were served out, and six men were stationed at the gate to be in readiness to open it to approaching friends, or to shut it in the face of foes.

But the others of the party were not so fortunate as these three. The Indians reached the fort before they did, and one of their number was left, unknown to them, in a state of insensibility near the spot where the first rencontre had taken place.

When the Indians and trappers met in the narrow defile, as before related, one of the arrows, which had been discharged very much at random, entered the shoulder of March Marston's horse and wounded it mortally. At first March thought the wound was slight, and, hearing the shouts of some of the savages not far behind him, he urged his horse forward as rapidly as the

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nature of the ground would admit of. Before he had gone a quarter of a mile, however, the poor steed fell, throwing March over its head. In his flight the youth's forehead came into violent contact with a branch, and he fell to the ground insensible.

His comrades, ignorant of his fate, continued their wild flight. Thus, our hero was forsaken, and left bruised and bleeding in the dark forest.

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CHAPTER XVI.

March gets a Surprise; more than that, he gets a Variety of Surprises. — Meets with a Strange Hunter. — Goes in a Strange Fashion to a Strange Cavern and beholds Strange Sights. — Besides other Matters of Interest.

On recovering consciousness, March discovered that it was broad day-light, — from which he argued in a confused sort of way that he must have lain there all night. He also discovered that his head, which ached violently, rested on the knee of some unknown individual, who bathed his temples with cold water. Looking up he encountered the gaze of a pair of soft blue eyes.

Now there is something exceedingly captivating in a pair of soft blue eyes — not that there may not be something quite as captivating in a pair of brown, or black, or gray eyes — but there is something singularly captivating in the peculiar style of captivation wherewith a man is captivated by a pair of blue, — distinctly *blue*, — eyes. Perhaps it is that their resemblance to the cerulean depths of the bright sky, and the blue profundities of the ocean, invests them with a suggestive influence that is agreeable to the ro-

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mantic and idealizing tendencies of human nature; or that the color is (or ought to be, if it is not), emblematic of purity. We throw out this suggestion solely for the benefit of unimpassioned philosophers. Those whose hearts are already under the pleasant thraldom of black or brown eyes are incapable of forming an opinion on the abstract question.

Well, March observed, further, that below those soft blue eyes, there was a handsome Roman nose, and immediately below that a moustache, and a thick short beard of curly light-brown hair. A slight — very slight, feeling of regret mingled with the astonishment with which March passed from the contemplation of the soft blue eyes to the bushy beard. He also noted that the stranger wore a little leathern cap, and that a profusion of rich brown hair descended from his head to his shoulders.

"Ye're better, lad," said the owner of the blue eyes in that deep musical bass voice, which one meets with but rarely, and which resembles strongly, at times, the low pipes of a cathedral organ.

"Thank ee, yes, I'm ——"

"There, don't move yet awhile. You're badly bruised, lad. I'll go fetch ye another drop o' water."

The owner of the blue eyes rose as he spoke, laid March's head softly on the ground, and

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walked toward a neighboring brook. In doing so he displayed to the wondering gaze of March the proportions of a truly splendid looking man. He was considerably above six feet in height, but it was not that so much as the herculean build of his chest and shoulders that struck March with surprise. His costume was the ordinary leather hunting shirt and leggings of a backwoodsman, and, although deeply bronzed, his color not less than his blue eyes and brown hair told that he was not an Indian.

As he returned, carrying a little birch-bark dish full of water in his hand, March observed that the lines of his forehead indicated a mingled feeling of anger and sadness, and that his heavy brows frowned somewhat. He also noted more clearly now the man's towering height, and the enormous breadth of his chest. As he lay there on his back with his head pillowed on a tuft of moss, he said inwardly to himself, "I never saw such a fellow as that before in all my life!"

And little wonder that March Marston thought thus, for, as no doubt the reader has already guessed, the far-famed Wild Man of the West himself stood before him!

But he did not know him. On the only occasion on which he had had an opportunity of beholding this renowned man, March had been rendered insensible just as he came on the field, and the exaggerated descriptions he had heard of him

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seemed quite irreconcilable with the soft blue eye and gentle manner of the hunter who had come thus opportunely to his aid. For one moment, indeed, the idea did occur to March that this was the Wild Man. It was natural that, having had his thoughts for so long a period filled with conjectures in reference to this wonderful creature, he should suppose the first tall, mysterious man he met must be he. But he dismissed the notion as untenable and absurd on second thoughts. That the blue-eyed, calm, dignified hunter who kneeled by his side and held the refreshing water to his lips as if he were a trained sick-nurse, should be the Wild Man, the man reported to be forty feet high, covered with hair, and exceeding fierce besides ugly, was out of the question. And when March shut his eyes in the full enjoyment of the cool draught, of which, poor fellow, he stood much in need, and heard the supposed wild man give vent to a sigh, which caused him to look up in surprise, so that he observed the mild blue eyes gazing sadly in his face, and the large head to which they belonged shaking from side to side mournfully, he almost laughed at himself for even momentarily entertaining such an absurd idea.

March Marston had much to learn — we mean in the way of reading human character and in judging from appearances. He had not yet observed, in the course of his short life, that if a

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blue eye is capable of expressing soft pity, it is also preëminently capable of indicating tiger-like ferocity. He did not consider that the gentlest natures are, when roused to fury, the most terrible in their outward aspect. He did not reflect that if this giant (for he almost deserved thus to be styled), instead of being engaged in an office of kindness, that naturally induced gentleness of action, and that called for no other feelings than those of tenderness and pity, were placed on a war-horse, armed with sword and shield, and roused to fury by some such sight as that of a large band of savage Indians attacking a small and innocent group of white trappers, he might then amply fulfil all the conditions that would entitle him to the wildest possible name that could be invented.

The prominent ideas in March's mind at that time were, a pair of blue eyes and a large, gentle hand; so he quietly and finally dismissed the Wild Man from his thoughts.

Luckily, the Wild Man did not treat March in a similar manner. After allowing him to rest quietly for a few minutes, he said —

"Now, lad, I think ye're improvin'. Ye're badly battered about the head and shoulders, so I'll take ye home with me."

"Home with you?" repeated March.

"Ay, put yer arms round my neck," returned the Wild Man in a tone which, though soft and low, it was not possible to disobey.

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March performed this somewhat endearing action in silent surprise, whereupon the Wild Man introduced his left arm below the poor youth's back, and with his right grasped him round the legs, and thus lifted him from the ground and carried him away.

March experienced a sensation as if all his larger joints were being dislocated, and felt disposed to cry out, but restrained himself with a powerful effort. Presently his bearer stopped, and, looking round, March observed that he was standing by the side of a horse.

"Hold on, lad, till I mount."

"You'd better let me down till you get up," suggested March.

"No," replied this singularly laconic individual.

Standing as he was, the Wild Man managed by raising March a little to lay his left hand on the pommel of his saddle; next moment his foot was in the stirrup, the moment after he himself was in the saddle, and a touch of his heel sent his horse cantering away toward the mountains.

Had March Marston seen his deliverer at that time, with his long hair waving freely in the breeze, in emulation of the voluminous mane and tail of his splendid horse, his thoughts regarding the Wild Man of the West would have certainly returned more powerfully than ever. But March did not see him, his eyes being shut, his lips

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pursed, and his teeth set in an heroic attempt to endure the agonies to which he was subjected by the motion of the horse.

In half an hour they reached a rocky defile that led up into one of those wild, gloomy glens that are so characteristic of the Rocky Mountains. Here the Wild Man had to check his pace and proceed at a walk, thereby affording much relief to his wounded companion.

"Art sore i' the bones, lad?" inquired the stout horseman, looking down at his charge as if he were a small infant in arms.

"Rather," replied March. "Don't you think it would be better for me to ride behind you? I think I could manage to hold on."

"No, you couldn't."

"I fear I must be a terrible weight carried in this fashion," urged March.

"Weight!" echoed the hunter, with a quiet chuckle, but, as he did not vouchsafe any further reply, March was left to interpret the expression as he thought fit.

"I hope no bones are broken?" inquired March in a tone of anxiety.

"Hope not," replied his captor.

We use the word "captor" advisedly, for March was so utterly unable at that time, physically as well as morally, to resist the will of this strange hunter, that he felt much more like a captive in the gripe of a mighty jailer than an invalid in the arms of his nurse.

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"I fear there are," said March, as a rude motion of the horse caused him excruciating agony.

"Very likely," replied the other — not by any means in a careless, indifferent way, but with the air and tone of a straightforward man giving his opinion in reference to a matter of fact. "But," he added in a consolatory tone, "I'll see when we get home."

"Home!" repeated March; "Why, where *is* your home?"

"In the mountains here. We're about there now."

As he spoke, the hunter turned his horse sharp to the left and entered a still more narrow and gloomy defile than the one they had just been ascending. So narrow was it and overshadowed by high precipitous cliffs that the light of day had to struggle for entrance even at noontide. At night it was dark as Erebus. The horse had considerable difficulty in advancing. Indeed no horse that had not been trained to pick his steps among the confused masses of rock and *débris* that formed the bottom of that ravine or chasm, could have ascended it at all. But the fine animal which bore March and the Wild Man of the West seemed to act more like a human being than a horse in winding out and in among the intricacies of the place.

At length they reached the upper end of the

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gorge. Here the cliffs, which rose perpendicularly to a height of three or four hundred feet, drew so near to each other that at one place they were not more than three yards asunder. Just beyond this point they receded again and terminated abruptly in a sort of circle or amphitheatre, the floor of which could not have been more than thirty yards in diameter, and was covered with small gravel; the sides were quite perpendicular, and rose so high that on looking up one felt as if one had got into the bottom of a natural funnel, at the top of which a round bit of bright blue sky sent down a few scanty rays of light.

In spite of the pain it cost him, March raised his head and looked round as they rode into this gloomy cavernous place. Then, glancing at the face of the strange being who carried him, a feeling of superstitious dread took possession of his heart for a moment, as he remembered the many conversations he and Bounce had had about evil spirits appearing in human form, and he thought that perhaps he had actually fallen into the hands of one. But the grave quiet face, and, above all, the soft blue eyes, quickly put to flight such fears, although they could not altogether dispel the solemn awe he felt at being carried so suddenly into such a mysterious place.

But he had scarcely recovered some degree of confidence, when his mind was again thrown into

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a violent state of agitation by the fact that the horse, turning to the right, began deliberately to ascend the precipice, which was as perpendicular as a wall. It did not indeed ascend after the manner of a fly on a window, but it went up on what appeared to be a narrow, spiral pathway. In a few seconds they had ascended about fifty feet, and March, projecting out from the precipice as he did, owing to his position in the rider's left arm, felt a horrible sensation of giddiness come over him, and could not suppress a slight groan.

"Don't be affeared, lad," said his companion, "I've got ye tight, an' the horse is used to it. The track's broader than ye think, only ye can't see it as ye lie now."

March felt reassured; nevertheless, he shut his eyes very tight and held his breath.

Presently he felt that they had turned sharp to the right, so he ventured to open his eyes, and found that they were standing at the mouth of what appeared to be a cavern. In another moment they were under its dark roof, and the horse came to a stand. From the hasty glance he gave it, he could only ascertain that the interior was buried in profound darkness.

Without causing March to move in any way, the stout horseman dismounted. In fact, the burden seemed no greater to him than a child would be to an ordinary man.

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"Here we are,—at home," he said. "Come, old horse, get away in."

The horse obeyed, and disappeared in the darkness beyond.

"Now, lad, don't be affeared, I know every fut o' the way. Ye can shut yer eyes an' ye like—but there's no occasion."

Saying this, he advanced with a steady tread into the cave, the echoes of which were still ringing with the clatter of the horse's hoofs as it passed over the stone floor. It could not have been more than a quarter of a minute when they reached the end of what appeared to be the outer vestibule of this cavern, though to March it seemed to be more than five minutes; and now that he could no longer see the blue eyes, all manner of horrible doubts and fears assailed him. He felt deeply his helpless condition, poor fellow. Had he been sound in wind and limb he would have cared little; for a brave and a strong man naturally feels that he can fight a stout battle for life in all or any circumstances. But part of this prop (namely, strength) having been removed by his recent accident, he felt like a miserable child.

Doubtless it is good for strong men to be brought thus low sometimes, just to prove to them what they are by nature very slow to believe, that they, quite as much as the weak

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and helpless ones of this world, are dependent at all times on their fellows.

On reaching the outer end of the outer cave, the hunter turned to the left, stooped down in order to pass below a small natural arch, and finally stood in the middle of another cavern, on the floor of which he deposited his burden with much tenderness and care.

There was a light in this cave, but it was so dim as to be insufficient to illuminate the surrounding objects. March perceived, on looking up, that it entered through a small aperture in the side of the cavern near the roof, which was not more than twelve feet from the floor. There were several pieces of charred wood on one side of the cave, in which a few sparks of fire still lingered.

Without saying a word the owner of this strange abode went toward these, and, blowing them into a flame, heaped large logs upon them, so that, in ten minutes, the place was brilliantly illuminated with a ruddy blaze that did one's heart good to look upon.

By the light of the fire March perceived that he had been deposited on a couch of pine-branches. He was about to make other observations, when his captor turned to him and said —

"I'll go an' see to the horse, an'll be back in a minute; so keep yer mind easy."

"And, pray, what name am I to call my host by?" said March, unable to restrain his curiosity any longer.

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A dark, almost fierce, frown covered the man's face, as he said angrily, "Boy, curiosity is a bad thing — anywise, it's bad here. I've brought you to this cave, 'cause you'd ha' died i' the woods if I had'nt. Don't ask questions about what don't consarn ye."

"Nay; friend, I meant no offence," replied March. "I've no desire to pry into any man's secrets. Nevertheless, it's but natural to want to know how to address a man when ye converse with him."

"True, true," replied the other, somewhat mollified. "Call me Dick, it's as good a name as any, and better than my own."

There was a slight tone of bitterness in the tone in which this was said, as the man turned on his heel to quit the cave.

"Stay," cried March, "you only give me one name, friend, so I'll do the same by you. My name's March, — there, you may march about your business."

Dick smiled, and said, "Well, March, I'll be with ye again, and have a look at your sore bones, in two minutes."

When he was gone, March, for the first time since his accident, bethought him of his comrades. Since recovering from the state of insensibility into which his fall had thrown him, his mind had been so absorbed by the strange events that had been presented to him in such rapid succes-

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sion, as well as with the pain that racked his head and limbs, that he had had no time to think about them. But, now that he was left in that quiet place alone, the whole circumstances of the recent pursuit and flight rushed suddenly upon him, and his mind was filled with anxious foreboding as to the fate of his comrades.

"Oh! I'm glad you've come back," he cried, as Dick reëntered the cave; "I quite forgot my comrades — shame on me! but my miserable head has got such a smash, that a'most every thing's been drove out of it."

"Time enough to speak o' them after we've seen to your bones," said Dick.

"Nay, but ——"

"*After*," said Dick, in a tone that was not to be gainsaid.

March submitted with a sigh, and his eccentric host proceeded to manipulate and punch him in a way that might, perhaps, have been highly necessary, but was by no means agreeable. After a few minutes he pronounced his patient all right, only a little bruised! Having said which, he proceeded to prepare some food, and said to March that he might now speak about his comrades.

At first he seemed to pay little attention to the youth's hasty narrative; but on hearing that the Indians were hastening to attack the Mountain Fort, he sprang up, and asked a few questions

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eagerly. It was evident that the news troubled him deeply.

Taking one or two hasty strides up and down the cavern, and paying no attention to the roasting meat, which he seemed to have utterly forgotten, the Wild Man of the West muttered angrily to himself, and a slight dash of that tiger-like flash, which had gone so far as to earn him his title, lighted up his blue eye, insomuch that March Marston looked at him in amazement not unmingled with awe. Thoughts of the Wild Man of the West once more occurred to him; but in his former cogitations on that subject he had so thoroughly discarded the idea of this kind blue-eyed hunter being that far-famed and ferocious individual, that his thoughts only took the form of the mental question, "I wonder if the Wild Man o' the West could beat such a fellow as that at a fair stand-up fight." So powerfully did this thought affect him, that he could not refrain from exclaiming —

"I say, Dick, did you ever hear of the Wild Man of the West?"

Dick was so much tickled by the question, that his angry mood vanished, and, turning toward his guest with a smile, while his blue eye seemed milder than ever it had appeared before, he said, —

"Yes, lad, I've heard of him."

"Have you seen him?" continued March eagerly.

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"I have, many a time."

"What is he like?"

"He's like *me*," replied Dick, with another smile, the softness of which would have driven March to an immeasurable distance from the truth, had he ever been near it.

"Like *you!* Oh, I suppose you mean he's something about your size. Well, I don't wonder at that, for you're an uncommonly big fellow, Dick; but I fancy his appearance is very different."

"Well, no. He's got light hair and blue eyes, like me."

This was a poser to March. It was so totally subversive of all his preconceived ideas, that it reduced him for some moments to silence.

"Isn't he hairy all over, like a fox, and very ugly?" inquired March, recovering from his surprise.

This was a poser, in turn, to the Wild Man. To be called upon suddenly to pronounce an opinion on his own looks was embarrassing, to say the least of it.

"He's not exactly hairy all over," said Dick, after a moment's thought, "though it can't be denied he's got plenty of hair on his head and chin — like me. As for his looks, lad, it ain't easy to say whether he's ugly or pritty, for men don't agree on sich pints, d'ye see."

"Do sit down beside me, Dick, and tell me

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about this Wild Man," said March, earnestly. "You can't fancy how anxious I am to see him. I've come here for that very purpose. No doubt I've come to shoot and trap, too, but chiefly to see the Wild Man o' the West. An' isn't it provokin'? I might have seen him some weeks agone, if I hadn't bin stunned with a fall jist as he come jumpin' into the middle o' us like a clap o' thunder——".

"What, lad," interrupted Dick, "was it *you* that I——"

Just at this moment Dick was seized with a very violent fit of coughing, which, coming as it did from such a capacious chest and so powerful a pair of lungs, caused the roof of the cavern to reverberate with what might have been mistaken, outside, for a species of miniature artillery.

"You've caught cold," suggested March, who gazed in unspeakable admiration at the magnificent locks and beard of this remarkable man, as they shook with the violence of his exertion.

"I *never* had a cold," replied Dick, becoming quiet again; "there's other things as cause a man for to cough, now and agin', besides colds."

"True," rejoined March; "but you were sayin' somethin'—do you know of the fight I was speakin' of?"

"Know of it—ay, that do I."

"Why, how did you happen to hear of it?"

"It's wonderful, lad, how I comes to know

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about things in this part o' the country. I know every thing the Wild Man does. He can't move without my bein' on his track d'rectly. In fact, I follers him like his shadow. Leastwise, his shadow follers me."

"Indeed, exclaimed March, whose interest in Dick became suddenly tenfold more deep on learning this. "But why do you follow him about in this fashion? Does he like your company, or do you only follow him on the sly, and keep out of sight? Explain yourself, Dick — you puzzle me."

"I can't explain just now, lad," said Dick, rising abruptly. "You forget that your comrades may be in a fix before now wi' them blackguard redskins. I must go an' help them. It's but right that white men should lend one another a helpin' hand in these regions, where the Injuns have it almost all their own way."

"But the Mountain Fort is far away from this, an' I'm afraid you'll never be able to get there in time," said March, with an anxious expression of countenance.

"I'll try," returned Dick. "Anyhow, I'll send the Wild Man o' the West to help them," he added, with a peculiar smile. "Now, boy, listen, I must not waste more time in idle talk. I shall leave you here under the charge of my little girl——"

"Your little girl!" echoed March in surprise.

"Ay, she ought to have been in before now,"

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continued Dick, without noticing the interruption, "an' I would like to ha' told her who ye are, and how I came by ye, an' what to do till I come back. But I can't wait; time's precious as gold just now; so I'll tell ye what to say to her when she ——"

At that moment a light footstep was heard in the outer cavern. The Wild Man sprang up on hearing it, and strode hastily through the natural doorway, leaving March to listen, in a state of the utmost bewilderment, to a silvery musical voice, which held rapid converse with his strange host.

Presently Dick returned, followed by a *vision in leather!* the sight of which struck March Marston dumb, and rendered him for a few moments as totally incapable of moving hand, tongue, or foot, as if he had been bewitched — which, in a sense, he was.

"This is the little girl I spoke of t'ye," said Dick, looking at March, and patting the girl on her soft cheek, with a hand that might have passed for a small shoulder of mutton. "She'll take good care of ye, March. I've told her what to do; but she don't need to be told. Now, see ye don't do yerself a mischief, lad, till I come back. It won't be long — a day or two, mayhap, more or less; but ye'll take that time to mend; you're worse battered than ye think of — so, good day."

While the Wild Man was ejaculating these sen-

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tences abruptly, he was striding about the cave with what may be styled *enormous* vigor, picking up and buckling on his weapons of war. He seized a double-edged sword of gigantic proportions and buckled it to his waist, but March saw it not. He pulled on the scalp-fringed coat of a Blackfoot chief, with leggins to match, but March knew it not. He slung a powder-horn and bullet-pouch round his shoulders, stuck a knife and tomahawk into his belt, and grasped a long rifle which stood in a corner; and, in doing all this, he made such a tremendous clatter, and displayed such wonderful activity, and grew so much fiercer to look at in every stage of the process, that March would certainly have recurred to the idea of the Wild Man, had he been in his ordinary state of mind; but he was *not* in that happy condition. March knew nothing about it whatever!

Before going, Dick stooped and kissed the "vision" on the cheek. March saw that! It recalled him for a moment and made him aware of the disappearance of his host, and of the loud clattering sounds of his charger's hoofs, as he led him, at a rapid walk, across the outer cave. March even heard the general clatter of all his accoutrements, as he vaulted into the saddle at one bound, and went down that terrible rocky way at a breakneck gallop that would have caused him (March), in other circumstances, to

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shudder. But he did *not* shudder. He was but faintly aware of these things. His intellect was overturned; his whole soul was captivated; his imagination, his perceptions, his conceptions — all his faculties and capacities were utterly overwhelmed and absorbed by that wonderful *vision in leather!*

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CHAPTER XVII.

The Vision in Leather.

It is all very well for men of the world, men of fashion, men who pride themselves on being highly civilized and peculiarly refined, to fancy that there are no other visions in this world than "visions in silk," "visions in white," and the like. Those who think thus labor under an egregious, though a civilized, mistake.

Happily there are kind, loving, pretty faces in this world, the possessors of which know nothing about pink gauze or white muslin. Faces that have never felt the hot air of a drawing-room, but are much used to present themselves, unveiled, to the fresh breezes of the prairie and the mountain; faces that possess the rare quality of universal attraction, and that cause men to fancy, when they see them for the first time, that they have beheld a vision!

The fact is that some faces are visions, whether the forms that support them appear to us in muslin or in deer-skin. The only requisite needful to constitute a face a vision to any particular person, is that it should have in it that peculiar *something* which everybody wants, but which

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nobody can define; which is ineffably charming, though utterly incomprehensible; and which, when once seen by any one, constitutes the countenance that possesses it a vision evermore!

It is quite immaterial what material composes the dress in which the vision appears. No doubt, the first time it bursts upon the smitten victim, dress may be a powerful auxiliary; but after the first time, dress goes for little or nothing. March Marston's vision appeared, as we have said, in leather.

After the Wild Man had vanished, March continued to gaze at his new companion with all kinds of feelings and emotions, but without being able to move or speak. The vision returned the compliment, also without speaking or taking any further notice of him.

She was a wonderful creature, that vision in leather! That she was of Indian extraction was evident from the hue of her skin, yet she was not nearly so dark as the lightest complexioned Indian. In fact her clear soft forehead was whiter than those of many so-called pale-faces; but her ruddy cheeks, her light-brown hair, and, above all, her bright brown eye showed that white blood ran in her veins. She was what men term a half-caste. She was young, almost girlish in her figure and deportment; but the earnest gravity of her pretty face caused her to look older than she really was. March, unconsciously and without an effort,

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guessed her to be sixteen. He was wrong. She had only seen fifteen summers.

Her dress was a beautifully-dressed deer-skin gown, reaching below the knees, as soft as chamois leather, and ornamented with beads and quill-work. It was girded round her small waist by a leather belt, from which depended a small hunting-knife. A pair of ornamented leggings of the same material as the gown covered her limbs, and moccasins her feet, which latter, as well as her hands, were small and beautifully formed. Over her shoulders were slung the masculine appendages of a powder-horn and bullet-pouch, proving that this creature was, so to speak, a Dianic vision.

Her staring so hard and so long at March without speaking or smiling, or taking any more notice of him than if he had been an effigy on a tombstone, seemed unaccountable to that youth. Had he been able to look at himself from her point of view, he would not have been so much surprised.

In his late accident he had received so severe a blow on the left eye that that orb was altogether shut up. As he did not move, and as the other eye, with which he gazed in supreme astonishment at the sweet face before him, happened to be furthest from the fire, besides being hid in the shadow of his own nose, — which was not a small one by nature, and was a peculiarly large

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one by force of recent circumstances,—the vision very naturally thought that he was fast asleep. As she stood there gazing wonderingly and somewhat sadly at the poor youth, with the red flickering flame of the fire lighting up her yellow garments, deepening the red on her round cheeks, glinting on the loose masses of her rich tresses, and sparkling in the depths of her bright brown eyes, March thought he had never in all his life before beheld such an exquisite creature.

Supposing that he was asleep, the vision sat down quietly on a log beside the fire, still keeping her eyes, however, fixed on her guest. The action took her out of the "direct line of fire" of March's sound eye, therefore he turned his head abruptly, and so brought his staring orb into the light of the fire, and revealed the fact that he was wide awake; whereupon the vision uttered an exclamation of surprise, rose hastily, and went to his side.

"You is woke," she said. "Me tink you was be sleep."

"Asleep!" cried March with enthusiasm, "no, I wasn't asleep. More than that, I'll never go to sleep any more."

This bold assertion naturally filled the vision with surprise.

"Why for not?" she asked, sitting down on a log beside March in such a position that she could see him easily.

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"For thinkin' o' *you!*" replied the bold youth, firmly.

The vision looked at him in still greater astonishment, opening her eyes slowly until they seemed like two pellucid lakelets of unfathomable depth into which March felt inclined to fling himself, clothes and all, and be drowned comfortably. She then looked at the fire, then at March again. It was evident that she had not been accustomed to hold intercourse with jocular minds. Perceiving this, March at once changed his tone, and, with a feeling of respect which he could not well account for, said, rather bluntly —

"What's your name?"

"Mary."

"Ay! did your father give you that name?"

"My father?" echoed the girl, looking hastily up.

"Ay, did Dick give it you?"

"Did him tell you him's name be Dick?" asked Mary.

"Oh! he's known by another name to you, then, it would seem. But, Mary, what *is* his name."

The girl pursed her mouth and laid her finger on it. Then, with a little sad smile, said —

"Him tell you Dick — that be good name. But Dick not my father. My father dead."

The poor thing said this so slowly and in such

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a low pathetic tone that March felt sorry for having unwittingly touched a tender chord. He hastened to change the subject by saying —

"Is Dick kind to you, Mary?"

"Kind," she cried, looking up with a flashing eye and flushed face, while with one of her little hands she tossed back her luxuriant tresses — "Kind! Him be my father *now*. No have got nobody to love me now but him."

"Yes, you have, Mary," said March, stoutly.

Mary looked at him in surprise, and said, "Who?"

"Me!" replied March.

Mary said nothing to this. It was quite clear that the Wild Man must have neglected her education sadly. She did not even smile; she merely shook her head and gazed abstractedly at the embers of the fire.

"Dick is not your father, Mary," continued March, energetically, "but he has become your father. I am not your brother, but I'll become your brother — If you'll let me."

March in his enthusiasm tried to raise himself; consequently he fell back and drowned Mary's answer in a groan of anguish. But he was not to be baulked.

"What said you?" he inquired, after a moment's pause.

"Me say you be very good."

She said this so calmly that March felt severely

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disappointed. In the height of his enthusiasm he forgot that the poor girl had as yet seen nothing to draw out her feelings toward him as his had been drawn out toward her. She had seen no "vision," except, indeed, the vision of a wretched dishevelled youth, of an abrupt excitable temperament, with one side of his countenance scratched in a most disreputable manner, and the other side swelled and mottled to such an extent that it resembled a cheap plum-pudding with the fruit unequally and sparsely distributed over its yellow surface.

March was mollified, however, when the girl suggested that his pillow seemed uncomfortable, and rose to adjust it with tender care. Then she said — "Now me bring blankit. You go sleep. Me sit here till you sleep, after that, me go away. If ye wants me, holler out. Me sleep in nixt room."

So saying, this wonderful creature flitted across the cavern and vanished, thereby revealing to March the fact that there was a third cavern in that place. Presently she returned with a green blanket and spread it over him, after which she sat down by the fire and seemed absorbed in her private meditations while March tried to sleep.

But what a night March had of it! Whichever way he turned, that vision was ever before his eyes. When he awoke with a start, there she was, bending over the fire. When he dreamed,

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there she was, floating in an atmosphere of blue stars. Sometimes she was smiling on him, sometimes gazing sadly, but never otherwise than sweetly. Presently he saw her sitting on Dick's knee, twisting his great moustache with her delicate hand, and he was about to ask Dick how he had managed to get back so soon, when he (the Wild Man) suddenly changed into March's own mother, who clasped the vision fervently to her breast and called her her own darling son! There was no end to it. She never left him. Sometimes she appeared in curious forms and in odd aspects — though always pleasant and sweet to look upon. Sometimes she was dancing gracefully like an embodied zephyr on the floor; frequently walking in mid-air; occasionally perambulating the ceiling of the cave. She often changed her place, but she never went away. There was no escape. And March was glad of it. He did'nt want to escape. He was only too happy to court the phantom. But it did not require courting. It hovered over him, walked round him, sat beside him, beckoned to him, and smiled at him. —— Never, — no, never since the world began was any scratched and battered youth so thoroughly badgered and bewitched, as was poor March Marston on that memorable night, by that naughty vision in leather.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

The Cave of the Wild Man of the West. — March and Mary hold Pleasant Intercourse. — Dick's Good Qualities enlarged on. — The Wild Man gives a Redskin a Strange Lesson. — A Startling Interruption to Pleasant Converse.

When March Marston awoke the following morning, and found himself lying on a low couch in the mysterious cavern of the Wild Man of the West, he experienced the curious sensation, with which every one is more or less familiar, of not knowing where he was.

The vision in leather which had worried him to such an extent during the night, had left him in peace — as most visions usually do — an hour or so before day-break, and as the real vision had not yet issued from the inner chamber of the cave, there was nothing familiar near him, when he awoke to recall his scattered senses. His first effort to rise, however, quickened his memory amazingly. Pains shot through all his limbs; the chase, the fall, Dick, the cavern, recurred to him; and last — but not least, for it obliterated and swallowed up all the rest — the vision broke upon his beclouded brain and cleared his faculties.

Looking curiously round the cavern, he ob-

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served for the first time — what he might have observed the night before had he not been preoccupied with sudden, numerous, and powerful surprises — that the walls were hung with arms and trophies of the chase. Just opposite to him hung the skin of an enormous grisly bear, with the head and skull entire, and the mouth and teeth grinning at him in an awful manner. Near to this were the skin and horns of several buffaloes. In other places there were more horns, and heads, and hides of bears of various kinds, as well as of deer, and, conspicuous above the entrance, hung the ungainly skull and ponderous horns of an elk.

Mingled with these, and arranged in such a manner as to prove that Dick, or the vision — one or other, or both — were by no means destitute of taste, hung various spears, and bows, and quivers, and shields of Indian manufacture, with spears and bows whose form seemed to indicate that Dick himself was their fabricator. There was much of tasteful ornament on the sheaths and handles of many of these weapons.

The floor of the apartment in which he lay was of solid rock, cleanly washed and swept, but there was no furniture of any kind — only a pile of fresh-cut pine-branches, with which the place was perfumed, and two or three rough logs which had been used as seats the night before by the host and hostess of this — to March — enchanted castle.

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March was staring earnestly at one of these logs which lay close to the ashes of the fire, trying to recall the form that had last occupied it, when a rustle at the inner passage attracted his attention, and next moment the vision again stood before him. It was, if possible, more innocent, and young, and sweet, than on the previous night.

"Good mornin'. You very good sleep, me hope?"

"Ay, that had I, a capital sleep," cried March, heartily, holding out his hand which the vision grasped unhesitatingly, and shook with manly vigor.

"Bees you hongray?"

"No, not a bit," said March.

The girl looked sad at this. "You muss heat," she said, quickly, at the same time raking together the embers of the fire, and blowing them up into a flame, over which she placed a large iron pot; "Dick hims always heat well an' keep well. Once me was be sick. Dick him say to me, 'Heat.' Me say, 'No want heat.' Hims say, 'You *muss* heat.' So me try; an', sure 'nuff, get well to-morrow."

March laughed at this prompt and effectual remedy for disease, and said, "Well, I'll try. Perhaps it will cure me, especially if you feed me."

Poor March saw, by the simplicity of his com-

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panion's looks, that gallantry and compliments were alike thrown away on her; so he resolved to try them no more. Having come to this conclusion, he said, —

"I say, Mary, come and sit by me while I talk with you. I want to know how you came to be in this wild, out-o'-the-way place, and who Dick is, and what brought him here, an', in short, all about it."

The girl drew her log near as he desired, but said, — "What Dick no tell, me no tell."

"But, surely," urged March, in a somewhat testy tone, "you may tell me *something* about ye."

Mary shook her head.

"Why not?"

"Dick say — 'No tell.'"

"Oh! Dick's an ass!"

Had Mary known the meaning of her companion's rude speech, she might possibly have surprised him with a decided opinion in regard to himself. But, never having heard of nor seen such a creature in all her life, she only looked up with a quiet expression of curiosity, and said, —

"What bees an ass?"

"Ha! ha! — ho! ho! a——" roared our hero, with a mingled feeling of exasperation and savage glee — "an ass? Why, it's a lovely slender creature, with short pretty ears and taper limbs, and a sleek, glossy coat, like — like *me*, Mary, dear; why, I'm an ass myself. Pray, do get me some-

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thin' to eat. I really believe my appetite's comin' back agin."

Mary looked at March in much concern. She had once nursed the Wild Man through a severe illness, and knew what delirium was, and she began to suspect that her guest was beginning to give way.

"Now, lie down," she said, with an air of decision that was almost ludicrous in one so youthful. Yet March felt that he must obey. "Me will git meat ready. You sleep littil bit."

March shut his eyes at once; but, the instant that Mary turned to attend to the iron kettle, he opened them, and continued to gaze at the busy little housewife, until she chanced to look in his direction, when he shut them again quickly, and very tight. This was done twice; but the third time Mary caught him in the act, and broke into a merry laugh. It was the first time she had laughed aloud since March met her; so he laughed too, out of sheer delight and sympathy.

When March had finished breakfast, he tried to get up, and found, to his great relief and satisfaction, that no bones were broken — a fact of which he had stood in considerable doubt — and that his muscles were less acutely pained than they had been. Still, he was very stiff, and quite unable, with any degree of comfort, to walk across the cave; so he made up his mind to lie there till he got well, — a resolution which, in the pride of

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his heart, he deemed exceedingly virtuous and praiseworthy, forgetting, either deliberately or stupidly, that the presence of Mary rendered that otherwise dull cavern the most delightful of sick chambers, and that her attendance was ample compensation and reward for any amount of pain or self-denial.

"Mary," he said, when she had cleared away the *débris* of the morning meal, "sit down here, and tell me a few things. You're so terribly close that one doesn't know what he may ask an' what he mayn't. But if you don't like to speak, you can hold your tongue, you know. Now, tell me, how old are you?"

"Fifteen," replied Mary.

"Ay! I thought ye'd been older. How long have ye bin with Dick?"

"In cave here—ten year. Before that, me live in my father's wigwam."

"Was yer father a trapper?" inquired March tenderly.

Mary's face at once assumed an expression of earnest gravity, and she answered, "Yes," in a low, sad tone.

March was going to have inquired further on this point, but fear lest he should hurt the feelings of the poor child induced him to change the subject.

"And how came ye," said he, "first to meet with Dick?"

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Mary pressed her lips.

"Oh! very well; don't tell if it ain't right, by no manner o' means. Do ye think that Dick intends to keep ye here always?"

"Me not know."

"Humph! An' you say he's good to ye?"

"Oh, yes," cried Mary, with a sudden blaze of animation on her usually placid countenance, "him's good, very good — gooder to me than nobody else."

"Well, I could have guessed that, seein' that nobody else has had any thing to do with ye but him for ten years past."

"But him's not only good to me — good to everybody," continued the girl, with increasing animation. "You not know *how* good—can't know."

"Certainly not," assented March; "it ain't possible to know, not havin' bin told; but if you'll tell me I'll listen."

March Marston had at last struck a chord that vibrated intensely in the bosom of the warm-hearted child. She drew her log closer to him in her eagerness to dilate on the goodness of her adopted father, and began to pour into his willing ears such revelations of the kind and noble deeds that he had done, that March was fired with enthusiasm, and began to regard his friend Dick in the light of a demigod. Greatheart, in the "Pilgrim's Progress," seemed most like him, he thought, only Dick seemed grander, which was a natural

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feeling; for Bunyan drew his Greatheart true to nature, while Mary and March had invested Dick with a robe of romance, which glittered so much that he looked preternaturally huge.

March listened with rapt attention; but as the reader is not March, we will not give the narrative in Mary's bad English. Suffice it to say, that she told how, on one occasion, Dick happened to be out hunting near to a river, into which he saw a little Indian child fall. It was carried swiftly by the current to a cataract fifty feet high, and in a few minutes would have been over and dashed to pieces, when Dick happily saw it, and plunging in, brought it safe to shore, yet with difficulty, that he barely gained the bank and grasped the branch of an overhanging willow, when his legs were drawn over the edge of the fall. He had to hold on for ten minutes, till men came from the other side of the stream to his assistance.

Mary also told him (and it was evening ere she finished all she had to tell him) how that, on another occasion, Dick was out after grislies with a hunter who had somehow allowed himself to be caught by a bear, and would have been torn to pieces had not Dick come up with his great two-edged sword — having fired off his rifle without effect — and, with one mighty sweep at the monster's neck, cut right through its jugular vein, and all its other veins down to the very marrow of its back-bone; in fact, killed it at one

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blow — a feat which no one had ever done, or had ever heard of as being done, from the days of the first Indian to that hour.

Many such stories did Mary relate to the poor invalid, who bore his sufferings with exemplary patience and fortitude, and listened with unflagging interest; but of all the stories she told, none seemed to afford her so much pleasure in the telling as the following: —

One day Dick went out to hunt buffaloes, on his big horse, for he had several steeds, one or other of which he rode according to fancy; but he always mounted the big black one when he went after the buffalo or to war. Mary here explained very carefully, that Dick never went to war on his own account, that he was really a man of peace, but that, when he saw oppression and cruelty, his blood boiled within him at such a rate that he almost went mad, and often, under the excitement of hot indignation, would he dash into the midst of a band of savages and scatter them right and left, like autumn leaves.

Well, as he was riding along among the mountains, near the banks of a broad stream, and not far from the edge of the great prairie, he came suddenly on an object that caused his eyes to glare and his teeth to grind; for there, under the shade of a few branches, with a pot of water by her side, sat an old Indian woman. Dick did not need to ask what she was doing there. He

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knew the ways of the redskins too well to remain a moment in doubt. She had grown so old and feeble that her relations had found her burdensome; so, according to custom, they left her there to die. The poor old creature knew that she was a burden to them. She knew also the customs of her tribe — it was at her own request she had been left there, a willing victim to an inevitable fate, because she felt that her beloved children would get on better without her. They made no objection. Food, to last for a few days, was put within the reach of her trembling hand; a fire was kindled, and a little pile of wood placed beside it, also within reach. Then they left her. They knew that when that food was consumed, and the last stick placed upon the fire, the shrunken limbs would stand in need of no warmth, — the old heart would be still. Yet that heart had once beat joyfully at the sound of those pattering feet that now retired with heavy ruthless tread forever. What a commentary on savage life! What a contrast between the promptings of the unregenerate heart of man and the precepts of that blessed — thrice blessed gospel of Jesus Christ, where love, unalterable, unextinguishable, glows in every lesson and sweetens every command.

When Dick came upon her, suddenly, as we have said, he was not ten paces distant from the spot where she sat; but she was apparently deaf

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and blind, for she evinced no knowledge of his presence. She was reaching out her skinny arm to place another stick upon the sinking fire at the time, for it was a sharp and cold, though a bright and sunny autumn day. Dick stopped his horse, crushed his teeth together, and sat for a few moments regarding her intently.

Either the firewood had originally been placed too far away from the old woman's hand, or she had shifted her position, for she could not reach it. Once and again she made the effort — she stretched out her withered arm and succeeded in just touching the end of one of the pieces of wood, but could not grasp it. She pawed it once or twice, and then gave up the attempt with a little sigh. Drawing herself slowly together, she gathered up the rabbit-skin blanket which rested on her shoulders and attempted feebly to fold it across her chest. Then she slowly dropped her white head, with an expression of calm resignation on her old wrinkled visage.

Dick's great heart almost burst with conflicting emotion. The wrath that welled up as he thought of the deserters was met by a gush of tender pity as he gazed through blinding tears on the deserted. With a fling that caused his stout war-horse to stagger, he leaped to the ground, tore open the breast of his hunting-shirt, and, sitting down beside the old woman, placed her cold hand in his bosom.

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She uttered a feeble cry and made a slight momentary effort to resist; but Dick's act, though promptly, was, nevertheless, tenderly done, and the big hand that stroked her white head was so evidently that of a friend, that the poor creature resigned herself to the enjoyment of that warmth of which she stood so much in need. Meanwhile Dick, without shifting his position, stretched forth his long arm, collected all the wood within reach, and placed it on the fire.

After a few minutes the old woman raised her head, and looking earnestly in Dick's face with her bleared and almost sightless eyes, said, in the Indian language, with which her companion was well acquainted, —

"My son, have you come back to me?"

A gush of indignant feeling had again to be violently stifled ere Dick could answer in moderate tones, —

"No, mother, he's *not* come back; but I'll be a son to ye. See, sit up an' warm yerself at the blaze. I'll get ye some meat and sticks."

In hot haste, and with desperate activity, for he had no other way of relieving his feelings, Dick cut down a quantity of firewood and placed it close to the hand of the old woman. Then he untied the tin kettle which he always carried at his saddle-bow, and, with a piece of dried venison, concocted a quantity of hot soup in a marvellously short space of time. This done, he sat

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down beside the old woman and made her partake of it.

"Is it long since they left ye, mother?" he said, after she had swallowed a little.

The old woman pondered for a few seconds.

"No," she said, "not long. Only one sun has gone down since my son left me." Then she added, in a sad tone, "I loved him. He is a great warrior — a brave chief — and he loved me too. But he had to leave me. I am old and useless. It is my fate."

"Describe your son to me," said Dick, abruptly.

"He is tall and straight as the poplar," began the old creature, while a look of pride played for a moment on her withered countenance. "His shoulders are broad and his limbs are supple. He can run and leap like the deer, but not so well as he once could. Gray hairs are now mingling with the black ——"

"Has he any mark by which I could find him out?" interrupted Dick, impatiently.

"He has a deep cut over his right eye," returned the woman; "but stay," she added, in some alarm, "you would not harm my son, you are not an enemy?"

"No, I would not; I would do him good. Which way did they go?"

"To the prairie — to the rising sun."

Dick at once arose, placed the kettle of soup

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close to the old woman's side, and, unbuckling his saddle-girth, removed the blanket that covered his saddle, and transferred it to her shoulders.

This done, without uttering another word, he vaulted into his saddle, and dashed away as if he were flying for his life. The old woman listened until the clatter of his horse's hoofs ceased to beat upon her deadened ear, and then bent her head, as at the first, in calm resignation. Doubtless she fancied that another fellow-creature had forsaken her, and that the end would soon come.

But Dick had not forsaken her. He bounded along over the rugged ground on the mettlesome steed, striking fire from the flinty rocks, leaping creeks and rivulets, bursting through bush and brake, mile after mile, until he gained the open prairie, while the black coat of his charger was speckled with foam. Here he drew rein, and trotted hither and thither in search of the tracks of the Indians. He found them at last, and dismounted to examine them, for, save to the eye of a trapper or a redman, there were no visible tracks on that hard turf.

Remounting, he resumed his headlong course — sweeping over the springy turf of the plains as if his horse were a winged Pegasus, whose energies could not know exhaustion. All day he rode, and as evening drew on he came in sight of the tribe of Indians.

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They had encamped for the night, and were preparing their evening meal; but when they saw the solitary horseman on the far-off horizon, the braves and old men went to the verge of the camp to watch him. On he came, bounding over the turf like the prong-horned antelope, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, but taking every thing that intercepted him in a flying leap, and bearing down on the camp as an arrow flies from the bow.

Although a single horseman is not usually an object of terror to a band of Indians, these braves soon began to evince by their looks that they did not feel easy in regard to this one. As he drew near they recognized him; for Dick had on a former occasion given this particular tribe a taste of his prowess. Each man instantly rushed to his weapons and horse; but the horses had been turned out to graze, and could not be easily caught. Before they secured their weapons Dick was in the midst of them. With an eagle glance he singled out the chief with the cut over his right eye, and rode between him and his tent. The Indian, seeing that he was cut off from his weapons, darted swiftly out upon the plain, and made for a clump of stunted trees, hoping to find shelter until his comrades could come to his rescue. But Dick was there before him, and rode down upon him in such a way that he was com-

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pelled to take to the open-plain and run for his life.

His pursuer allowed him to run, keeping just close enough to him to force him into the particular course he desired him to take. But the savage proved, indeed, to be what his mother had styled him — a brave chief. Apparently resolving rather to die than to be hunted thus like a wolf, he halted suddenly, turned sharp round, and, crossing his arms on his bare chest, looked Dick full in the face as he came up. Just as he was within ten yards of him, the Indian drew his knife, and hurled it at the breast of his enemy with such violence that it hissed in its passage through the air. Dick received it on his shield, where it stood quivering. Plucking it therefrom with a grim smile, he placed it in his own girdle, and riding up to the Indian, sternly bade him mount in front of him.

There was no refusing to obey that voice. The Indian cast one uneasy glance toward his camp, which was now far away on the plain, but there was no sign of any one coming to the rescue. His captor had got the credit of being an evil spirit, and he felt that he was left to his fate. A hasty repetition of the order compelled him to turn and seize the mane of the horse. Dick held out his toe for him to step on; the next moment he was seated in front of the pale-face, galloping toward the mountains.

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Whatever astonishment the Indian felt at this singular treatment, or whatever his curiosity as to the result of it all, his countenance expressed nothing but calm scorn and defiance. He was evidently working himself into that state of mind which these redskin warriors endeavor to assume when they are captured and taken to the stake and the torture, there to prove their title to the name of brave by enduring the most inconceivable agonies with stoical indifference, or there to bring discredit on their tribe, infamy on their name, and joy to their enemies, by breaking down under the infliction of tortures, at the bare mention of which humanity shudders.

For some time they maintained the same headlong speed. When, however, all danger of pursuit was over, Dick drew rein, and proceeded more leisurely, in order to relieve his now jaded steed. But that was a steed of the true metal. It possessed that generous spirit which would have induced it willingly to exert itself even to the death. Its owner might have ridden it till it fell prostrate and dying on the plain, but he could not have ridden it to the point of refusing to advance because of exhaustion. He was merciful to it, and went slowly during the night; but he did not come to a final halt until the rising sun found him close to the camp of the dying woman.

The Indian now for the first time began partly

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to guess the object of his having been brought there, and steeled his heart to bear whatever might await him.

Dick dismounted, and grasping the Indian with a force that showed him how helpless he would be in a personal struggle should he venture to attempt it, led him forward, and placed him a few paces in front of his dying mother.

She was sitting just as she had been left, but the fire had gone out, and she trembled violently beneath the blanket which she had sought to pull closer around her wasted form. Dick blamed himself mentally for having put so little wood on the fire, and proceeded to rekindle it; but, before doing so, he took a chain from his saddle-bow, with which he fastened the Indian to a tree that stood exactly opposite the spot on which the old woman sat, and not ten paces distant. He bound him in such a way that he could sit on the ground and lean his back against the tree, but he could neither stand up nor lie down.

For the first time the countenance of the savage betrayed uneasiness. He believed, no doubt, that he was to be left to witness the dying agonies of his mother, and the thought filled him with horror. To leave her, as he did to perish, had not been difficult, because he knew that he should not see the act of perishing; but to be brought there and compelled to witness this terrible doom acted out in all its minute and

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horrible details on the mother whom he had once loved so tenderly, was maddening to think of. All the dread tortures that had yet been invented and practised on warriors must have seemed to him as nothing compared with this awful device of the pale-face, on whom he now glared with the eyes of implacable hate and ferocity.

"Will the pale-face," he said, fiercely, "cast me loose, and meet me hand to hand in a fair fight? Surely," he added, changing his tone to one of ineffable scorn, "the pale-face is not weak, he is not a small man, that he should fear a chief like Bighorn."

"Hark'ee! Bighorn," said Dick, striding up to him, and laying the cold edge of his hatchet on the Indian's forehead; "if you speak another word above yer breath, the pale-face will cleave ye to the chin."

There was something so thoroughly resolute in Dick's voice that the Indian was cowed effectually.

The fire was soon lighted, and Dick chafed and warmed the limbs of the old woman until he brought back the vital spark. Then he set on the kettle to boil. While a new mess was preparing, he went into the wood, and, with lusty blows, brought down the trees and cut them into huge billets, which he piled upon the fire until it roared again, and the heart of the feeble creature

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began to beat once more with somewhat of its wonted vigor. This done, he arranged a couch in such a way that she might get the full benefit of the heat without being scorched; after which he rubbed down his good steed and cast it loose to feed, then he cooked and ate some food, but offered never a bit to the Indian, who gazed at him as he performed these various actions with ever-increasing amazement and anxiety.

Then Dick sat down beside the old woman, to feed and tend her till she should die; and he knew the signs of death too well to suppose that his care would be long required. All that day, and all that night, and all the next day, did the trapper, the old woman, and the Indian, remain in much the same position. Dick moved about a little, to give the old woman food and drink as she required it, and to wrap the blanket more comfortably round her, for which kind deeds the poor creature often tried to gaze fondly in his face with her sightless eyes.

During all this time her son sat opposite, observing every look and motion, yet unable himself to move. The pangs of hunger now began to gnaw within him, and from his cramped position, he became so cold that he trembled violently in every limb, despite his efforts to command himself. But Dick paid no attention whatever to him; he knew that he was strong, and could stand it. Once the Indian implored his jailer to

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give him some food, but Dick said, sternly,—"I'll give ye food before ye die, *if ye keep quiet.*"

At last, about nightfall of the second day, the sands of life began to run slowly. Dick saw that the old woman's end was approaching, so he rose, and, going toward her son, he placed food before him. He devoured it ravenously. Then he gave him drink, and, loosing him, led him to the fire, where he speedily recovered his wonted heat and energy. After that, Dick led him to his mother's side and made him kneel.

"Mother," said Dick, "can you see and hear me?"

"Ay, but you are not my son," said the dying woman, faintly. "You are a pale-face—you are very good—but you are not my son."

"True, mother; but see, I have brought your son back to you! Lay your hand on her forehead," he added, in that low, stern undertone which he had used throughout to Bighorn, who could not but obey, "stroke her head, look in her eyes, and speak to her."

The redman did not require to be told now. A natural impulse led him to do as he was bid. The instant the tones of his voice struck her ear, the old woman seemed to awaken with a start; she looked up eagerly, caught the hand that touched her forehead, and, passing her own thin hand up to the Indian's face, felt the scar over his eye, as if to render herself doubly sure.

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Then she grasped the hand again in both of hers, and, taking it under the blanket, pressed it to her withered breast and held it tightly there.

But that burst of unexpected joy hastened the falling of the last few grains of sand. For ten minutes longer they watched her as the breath came and went more and more feebly. Then it ceased altogether, and death sealed her eyes. But she did not release the hand of her son. He had some difficulty in loosening that clasp of maternal love which was stronger even than death.

After all was over, Dick seized the Indian and led him to the tree, to which he chained him again. Then he dug a grave in the soft soil, in which he placed the body of the old woman with gentle care. Having covered it over he went into the woods, caught and saddled his horse, and led him toward the wondering savage, whom he once more unbound and set free.

"Bighorn," said Dick, impressively, "you've been made to comfort and gladden the heart o' yer old mother in her last moments. If ye was a pale-face, ye'd thank the Great Spirit for that to the last day o' yer life. If you ever do come to think like the pale-faces, you'll remember that you've to thank me for bringing you here. Go, tell the redskins who it is that caught ye, and what he did and said to ye."

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Saying this, Dick mounted his horse and rode very slowly into the forest, leaving the redman standing by the side of his mother's grave.

After Mary had concluded this story, which, we may remark, she related with much fewer comments than we have seen fit to pass upon it, she and March looked at each other for a long time in silence. Then March suddenly exclaimed, —

"He's a splendid fellow, — Dick!"

Mary, both by looks and words, highly approved of this opinion. "And yet," said she, somewhat abstractedly, "this bees the man who peepils call ——"

Mary pursed her lips suddenly.

"Call *what?*" inquired March, quickly.

"Wicked, wild, bad man," replied Mary, who, fortunately, could say all this with perfect truth without betraying her secret. In fact, poor Mary had never had a secret confided to her before, and having been told by the Wild Man of the West that she was on no account to reveal his real title to their guest, she was in the utmost perplexity lest it should slip out unawares.

"Mary," said March, who was always stumbling upon the verge of the truth in a most unaccountable way, without actually getting hold of it, "have you ever seen the Wild Man of the West?"

"Yes," replied the girl, with a gay smile.

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"Have you? Well now, that's odd! How much I should like to see him. To tell you the truth, one of my chief reasons for coming here was to see him. What like is he?"

"Like Dick," replied the girl, quietly.

"Like Dick!" echoed March in surprise; "why, that's what Dick said himself, and yet, by all accounts, his character must be very different from that of Dick, who seems to be the kindest, tenderest-hearted man that ever came to trap in the Rocky Mountains."

"What does peepils say 'bout this Wild Mans of the West?" inquired Mary.

"That he's awful fierce an' terrible cruel, an' ten or fifteen feet high, I forget which, for everybody gives him a different height."

Mary laughed. "Bees that all?"

"Oh no! They say he eats men."

Mary laughed again.

"An' women and bears — raw."

Mary laughed louder and longer than ever, and when she laughed she looked so ineffably sweet, that March resolved to go on with the catalogue of the Wild Man's virtues piece-meal, waiting for the laugh between each statement, until there was not another idea left in his brain for his tongue to utter. But this amiable intention was frustrated by the report of a gun outside, which echoed and reëchoed among these savage cliffs,

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like muttering thunder. It was followed by a yell that caused Mary to start up with a look of horror and rush out of the cave, leaving the invalid in a most distressing state of uncertainty as to what he should do, and in no little anxiety as to what would happen next.

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CHAPTER XIX.

The Mysteries of the Cave explained. — Ingenious Devices of the Wild Man. — March and Mary besieged. — The Redskins proceed to make themselves at Home in the Cavern.

THERE are few things in this world which are not somewhat mysterious, or that cannot be by a peculiar combination of circumstances, more or less invested with mystery; and we hold it to be an unfair and a very paltry device on the part of an author to seek to mystify his readers by keeping them in unnecessary ignorance of that which is in itself simple and commonplace.

Therefore, we beg leave to state that the apparent mystery with which we concluded the last chapter was not a mystery at all! The loud report there referred to was caused by a savage discharging his gun, and the cry that followed was the result of that same savage opening his ugly mouth and giving vent to a tremendous howl.

That this was a howl of triumph was evident to ears accustomed to the war-whoop of the redman. That it was destined to be succeeded by an exclamation of mingled disappointment and sur-

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prise was evident, at least to Mary, who knew the mysteries of the place.

In order to make this plain without further circumlocution, we may as well inform the reader at once that the Wild Man of the West (perhaps we should call him Dick, in deference to March Marston's ignorance of his real character at this time) was not only a subject of terror to the Indians inhabiting this region of the earth at that particular era in the world's history, but also a subject of intense curiosity. Hence, for many years past it had been an object of ambition, on the part of the more courageous of the Indian warriors, to trace this terrible creature to his familiar haunts, and "beard the lion in his den."

Dick soon became fully aware of this, and, *not* being a mysterious monster or demon, but a mere mortal (although, doubtless, a singularly huge and eccentric one), it behoved him to frustrate the amiable intentions of his savage tormentors. In order to effect this, he first of all selected, as we have seen, a gloomy, secluded, and almost inaccessible spot among the Rocky Mountains as his residence, which he made a point of quitting and returning to only in the dark hours of night or early morning, so far as was practicable.

Still further to bewilder the savages, — against whom he bore no grudge, and to avoid encoun-

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tering whom was his chief desire — Dick varied his costume, appearing sometimes in the dress of a Blackfoot chief, or a Cree warrior; at other times in the hunting-shirt and cap of a trapper. But, despite his utmost efforts, he occasionally had to face and fight the redskins — a necessity which so exasperated his naturally fiery temper that, on such occasions, he became utterly regardless of his life, and rushing upon any odds with a terrific roar of his deep bass voice, so different from the shrill yell of the Indians — would cleave his way right through their ranks with his long double-edged sword; then, returning to the charge with increased fury, would so appal and horrify them, that the usual result was a general and precipitate flight.

Perhaps some readers may wonder how it was possible that he could escape being killed in these encounters; but it must be remembered that in those days guns were by no means so plentiful among the Indians as they now are, and arrows are comparatively harmless missiles. Dick always wore under his leather coat, a vest of thick buffalo leather, which rendered him arrow-proof in the vital regions of his body, unless shot at with a strong bow by a powerful arm from a short distance.

This under-coat or piece of armor added a little to his naturally gigantic proportions, which were still further enhanced by the flying tags and

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scalp-locks and fringes of his dress, and the wild masses of his long hair. He rode, as we have elsewhere mentioned, a magnificent charger, which he had purchased in Mexico, and whose sire, no doubt, had been one of those noble barbs which bore the cavaliers of Spain to the conquest of the New World. The mane and tail of this animal, having never been cut, were of immense length, and, when violently agitated, seemed to envelop horse and man. Altogether, the *tout ensemble* of Dick and his charger on any of the rencontres above referred to, was sufficiently awful, and as he was seldom seen near at hand, except in a condition of blazing fury, there is little wonder that, in the process of time, he became celebrated throughout the country as the Wild Man of the West.

The white trappers, too, were somewhat curious to know something about this mysterious brother; but he shunned them even more determinedly than he did the Indians, though, of course, he never fought with them, seeing that they did not attempt to murder him or interfere with his movements as the savages did. But there were one or two bolder or more inquisitive than their comrades, who dogged the Wild Man, and tried to force themselves upon him. These he caught and thrashed soundly, after the fashion of a schoolmaster with a refractory boy, and turned them adrift with a warning thenceforth

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to mind their own business. At last the Indians set him down as a "great medicine-man," or a demon, whom it was impossible to slay; and the trappers shook their heads and touched their foreheads significantly, as if to indicate that they thought him mad.

Thus Dick, in course of years, freed himself in a great measure from annoyance, and many good and kind actions which he did both to Indians and trappers, began to be circulated and exaggerated, so that he became a greater mystery than ever, especially to the savages, who naturally misconstrued the spirit in which he made his furious attacks in self-defence, just as much as they misunderstood his motives in performing deeds of kindness. He was a monstrous mystery! the greatest mystery that had ever been seen or heard of in the Rocky Mountains since the beginning of time, and, no doubt, a greater mystery than will ever be heard of there again!

Having traversed this roundabout pathway, we now come to the explanation which we intended to have given much earlier in this chapter. But it is really wonderful, how natural it is for the human mind to prose and to diverge, and how very difficult it is, at any time, to come to the point! Public speakers know this well. Perhaps their hearers know it better!

Well, although Dick was thus feared, yet he was not entirely unmolested. Wandering tribes

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from distant hunting-grounds used to go there, and, not knowing much about the Wild Man of the West, did not believe in him; even ventured to go in search of him, and, on more than one occasion, almost caught him asleep in his cave. Having an ingenious turn of mind, and being somewhat fanciful, he devised a curious plan to deceive the savages and warn him of their approach.

By means of an axe and a knife, he carved a representation of his own head, and covered it with hair by means of the tail of one of his light-colored horses, which he docked for that purpose. (His steeds, by the way, occupied another chamber of the cavern in which he dwelt.) The head thus formed, he planted behind a bush that grew on the ledge of rock about two yards from the bottom of the cliff of the amphitheatre outside, and directly opposite to the entrance to it. The cave, it will be remembered, was on the right of that entrance. Thus, the first thing the savage beheld, on prowling up to the opening of the amphitheatre, was Dick's image peeping at him over the bush opposite. Of course the instantaneous result was the firing of a shot or the discharge of an arrow, which, the Indians being excellent marksmen, invariably alighted on the bridge of Dick's nose, or in the centre of his forehead, or in one or other of his eyes. As the head was balanced on the front edge of a deep narrow hole

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which happened to be there, it was invariably knocked into that hole by the blow, and disappeared.

This was the supposed fall of the famous Wild Man that caused the yell which has taken so long to account for, and the discovery of nothing behind that bush except a small deep hole, much too small to secrete even a little man's body in, was the cause of the explanation of surprise which we asserted would certainly follow.

When an event of this kind happened, Dick had a large blunderbuss in readiness. It was loaded with a tremendous charge of small shot, and a small charge of powder, for he did not want to kill. His object was simply to punish and to terrify. He also had in readiness a curious machine which we find it rather difficult to describe. Every one has heard, no doubt, of the wooden wheels, with wooden axles, attached to the carts in some eastern countries, which groan, and creak, and yell, and shriek for want of grease, in a manner that is almost maddening to all but native ears. Dick's invention was founded partly on the principle of these eastern carts, only it was worked by turning a handle, and its sounds were much more excruciatingly intense.

On being startled, then, Dick was wont to seize his blunderbuss, rush into the outer cave where the shrieking-machine was, give the handle half a dozen turns, and thus awaken, as it were, all the

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demons of the Rocky Mountains. Dick came at last to know exactly what state of things he would find outside. At the first burst of discord the savages, however numerous, took to their heels, and when Dick emerged from his cave, they were always within a yard or two of the entrance to the amphitheatre, every man with outstretched arms, sloped forward at the acutest possible angle with the ground, rushing on the wings of terror in a flight of unparalleled precipitancy.

To pour the charge of small shot down into the centre of the flying mass was the work of a moment; to mount his unsaddled charger, and dash down the steep rugged path with a clatter equal to that of half a squadron of dragoons, was the work of two minutes more. To pull up suddenly, when he had terrified the spirits of the intruders wellnigh out of their bodies, return slowly to his rude domicile, reload his blunderbuss, and retire to rest with a grim smile on his bearded mouth, and a lurking expression of fun in his big blue eyes, as he drew his blanket over him, was the usual termination of such a scene.

But this was not all. Dick, like a wise man, had prepared for the worst. In the event of the Indians ever getting the length of the interior of his den, there were other contrivances ready for them; chief among which was a large cistern or tank of water, directly over the fireplace, the front of which was movable, and could be pulled

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down by means of a cord passing into the innermost cave of all, — namely, the third cavern which we have alluded to as being Mary's dormitory. By pulling this cord, the result — instantaneous and hideous — would be that a deluge of water would drown the fire black out, fill the cavern with hot suffocating steam and ashes, and flood the floor.

How the cavern was to be defended when he himself was not there, was a problem which Dick, being a mere man and not a demon, had utterly failed to solve. Of course, he could easily have set all manner of man-traps and spring-guns, but as these might have taken effect upon some poor wretch who had no design upon his life, he could not venture to run the risk.

On the present occasion — Dick being absent, March being prostrated and all but helpless, and Mary being unable to turn the handle of the shrieking-machine or to fire the blunderbuss, which kicked like a small cannon — the case of the romantic pair was desperate, and their only hope seemed to be that the savages would go away without examining the cavern. Vain hope!

But Dick had not left them to take their chance in that way. He had warned Mary, long ago, how to act in such circumstances, and she soon returned to March with the news that there were four Indian warriors outside, examining the bush

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behind which the head had disappeared, and that they would very soon find out the cave.

"That's not pleasant news, Mary," said March, starting up in spite of pain and giddiness; "you seem to take it very easy!"

"Com, quick," said she, seizing March by the hand; "com with me."

March said, mentally, that he would go with her into the jaws of death, if need be; but he followed up the mental speech with the audible remark, that he had better take some weapon with him.

"No, no; com! Me git you spear, hatchet very quick; but, com."

So saying, she dragged, rather than conducted, March to the little opening which led into her dormitory. He had to stoop on entering; and great was his amazement on finding himself on the brink of a black yawning gulf, that seemed to descend into the bowels of the earth. The end of a narrow plank rested on the edge of this gulf, and appeared to bridge it over, but the other end of the plank, and all beyond, were lost in impenetrable darkness.

"Com after me," said Mary, passing rapidly across the gulf and disappearing — absolutely like a vision.

March hesitated. He tried to steady his somewhat giddy head, but the single word "Com" issuing from darkness in a very commanding

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tone settled the point. He staggered across, held out his hands, and almost tumbled over his fair guide, on reaching the other end of the plank much sooner than he expected.

"Now, wait. I will com agin," said Mary, recrossing.

The view back was a very different thing from the view forward. As he stood there, on the brink of the yawning gulf, March could see right through into the cavern he had just left, and could observe every thing that took place there. Mary hastily loaded herself with a rifle and the blunderbuss, also with powder-horn, bullet-pouch, and a bag containing buffalo-tongues. With these she returned quickly, and, brushing past her companion, carried them further into the cave.

"Now, help me pull," she said, laying hold of the plank.

March obeyed; and obedience cost him much, poor fellow, for it seemed as if, in the act, he had rent asunder every muscle in his right shoulder. The plank being thus drawn away, an impassable gulf was left between the inner and middle cavern, which, even in the event of its being discovered, presented no particular temptation to induce any one to explore further. Mary drew the plank into the long natural passage which led to her private apartment; and as this passage turned abruptly to the right, there was no possi-

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bility of any one on the other side of the gulf being able to see into it. Indeed, a light in it was not visible from that point of view, and their voices could not be heard unless they spoke loudly.

Just as the plank was withdrawn, the Indians discovered the mouth of the cavern, and in a few minutes the two watchers beheld a painted savage peep in at the opening of the centre cave. Seeing that it was empty, and observing at a glance the opening into the inner cave, he drew back quickly. A minute after, the four Indians darted across, and got out of range of that opening, evidently fearing that some one was there. They flitted past so quickly, yet noiselessly, that they appeared more like shadows than real men.

Presently one of them stepped full in front of the opening with a bow and arrow in his hand. The light of the fire was strong. March saw him raise the bow, and had just time to draw back when an arrow whizzed past him, and was broken to pieces on the rock behind his back. Instantly after the echoes of the place burst forth as a shot was fired in the same direction. Having thus made sure that the way was clear, the boldest of the savages entered with a blazing pine-knot held high above his head — the others following with bows ready, and arrows fitted to the string.

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On reaching the edge of the yawning chasm, the foremost savage held the torch over it, and they all gazed in silence into its unfathomable depths. Satisfied that it was impassable, they consulted for a few minutes, and then, apparently coming to the conclusion that the place was untenanted, they returned to the middle cave, and began to rummage and toss about the things they found there.

"Bring the rifle," whispered March. "I can floor two at a shot as they now sit."

"No," Mary replied, firmly. "Why make blood? They will go 'way soon."

Mary was right; but a circumstance occurred which caused them to go away sooner than either she or they had anticipated.

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CHAPTER XX.

A Gallop to the Rescue. — A Discovery. — Right-about Face. — A Disagreeable Surprise and a Sudden Ejection. — A Calm after the Storm. — Mary a Huntress. — Dick's Story of the Murdered Trapper.

When Dick, *alias* the Wild Man of the West, left his cave, as narrated in a previous chapter, and galloped away with reckless speed to afford the aid of his stout right arm to his friends in the Mountain Fort, — for he counted them friends, although they little knew it, — he felt that if he was to be of any use he must travel over the country as he had never travelled before, except once, when he had to fly for his life before five hundred Pawnee warriors.

It was a grand sight to behold that Herculean backwoodsman on his noble steed, which seemed so well proportioned to its rider that it carried him as if he were but a boy, flying over the country on this brotherly errand. Mile after mile was passed, not indeed at full speed, for that would have broken the good horse down long before the goal was reached, but at a bowling gallop, taking bogs, and rocks, and fallen trees, and watercourses, with an elastic bound that

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told of bone and muscle, overflowing with surplus energy.

Dick patted the horse's arching neck with a look of pride and affection, and the animal tossed its head with a slight neigh of pleasure and a playful snap toward its rider's right foot; for it loved its master, as the lower animals do always love those who treat them well, and it loved a wild, long, careering gallop, for that was the only means by which it could relieve its feelings.

There was something unusually wild-like about this horse, besides its great size and extraordinarily long mane and tail. It carried its head high and its ears pointed forward, and it looked boldly from side to side, as it went springingly along, more like a human being than a horse. It actually appeared to be taking intelligent notice of things around it. So much so, that Dick had got into a habit of saying a word or two now and then to it, in a grave tone, as if he were conversing with a friend.

"Ay, it's a fine country, isn't it?" he said, patting the neck again.

The ears were pointed backwards at once, and a little neigh or squeak, with a toss of the head, was the reply.

"Pity ye can't speak, an't it?" continued Dick, in a low, quiet tone.

The horse appeared to know that this was merely a meditative remark, not pointedly ad-

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dressed to itself, for it only put back one ear and kept the other forward.

"Now, lass," said Dick, firmly (both ears went full back at that sound and remained there), "take it easy; don't exert yerself over much, it an't no use, a short pace or two, and — so."

The horse went full swing over a roaring watercourse as he spoke, and alighted safe on the opposite bank, but the gravelly soil was treacherous; it gave way, and the animal's hind-legs slipped back. With a bound Dick sprang to the ground.

"Hyp, good horse," he cried, raising the rein.

A powerful effort, and footing was regained. Dick vaulted into the saddle (he seldom used the stirrup), and away they went again, blithe as ever. Then a long stripe of tangled forest appeared. Dick diverged here. It was easier to skirt it than to crash through it. Presently a broad deep river came in view. There was no looking for a ford, no checking the pace. In they went with sounding plunge, as if water were their native element, breasted the foaming tide, and, gaining the opposite bank, went steadily forward.

Thus on they sped, over hill and dale, all that night, for the moon was bright in the cloudless sky, and part of next day. Then Dick made a sudden halt and dismounted, to examine something on the ground. Footprints of Indian

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horses — four of them — going in the direction of his dwelling!

Dick rose, and his strong brows were knitted, and his lips firmly pressed together. For a moment or two he pondered, then he told his horse to follow him, and, dropping the bridle, set off at a rapid walk, keeping steadily on the tracks, and stooping now and then to examine them when the nature of the ground rendered them less discernible. Thus he retraced his course for about a mile, when he stopped and muttered, "No doubt o't. Them reptiles niver comes to these diggins but when they want to pay *me* a visit."

As he said this he remounted his horse and sat for a minute or two undecided. It was hard to give up his purpose; but it was impossible to leave his cavern defenceless with Mary in it, and the certainty that savages were hunting it out. That thought settled the matter. He shook the reins, and back they flew again toward the cave, at a much quicker pace than they had hitherto maintained.

The result was that Dick gained the entrance of his ravine just two hours later than the savages, and in time to superintend, personally, the hospitalities of his own dwelling. Riding quickly up to the head of the gorge, he dismounted and ascended the pathway to his cave with giant strides and a beating heart, for Dick thought of

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Mary, and the words "too late" *would* whizz about in his brain.

The Indians were still sitting round the fire enjoying themselves, when March and Mary, to their unutterable surprise, beheld Dick stride through the low doorway of the cave, raise himself to his full height, and stand before the stricken invaders, absolutely blazing with wrath. His eyes, his hair, his beard, his glistening teeth, seemed each individually imbued with indignation.

The Indians did not move — they could not move — they simply sat and stared, and thus both parties continued for a quarter of a minute.

Mary used that short time well. She knew exactly what to do. Darting into her chamber, she seized the end of the rope connected with the tank and pulled it violently. March saw the rock above the fireplace drop! A clear, sparkling cataract sprang as if by magic from the wall! Next instant there was black darkness and yells, steam, shrieks, and howls, — a hissing, hurling hubbub, such as no man can possibly conceive of unless he has seen and heard it! We will not, therefore, even attempt a description.

The Indians rushed *en masse* to the doorway. Death in the jaws of the Wild Man of the West was infinitely preferable to being par-boiled and suffocated; but the Wild Man had judiciously made way for them. They gained the outer cave,

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and sprang down the pathway. Dick plied the handle of the shrieking-machine with the secondary object in view of relieving his own feelings! The din was indescribable! If those Indians are not lunatics at this moment they must be dead, for there could be no alternative in the circumstances. Certain it is, they vanished like smoke, and they have never been heard of since — from that day to this!

Really, dear reader, if it were not that we are recounting the doings of a Wild Man, — a notoriously eccentric creature, — we would feel it necessary to impress upon you that such scenes as we have been describing are not characteristic of life in the Rocky Mountains; nay, more, we question whether such scenes as these have ever been witnessed or enacted in those regions at any time, with the exception, of course, of the present occasion. But it must be carefully borne in mind that we are recounting the deeds of a "Wild Man," and, although the aspect of outward things — the general tone and current of manners, and customs, and natural phenomena — may remain exactly the same as heretofore, and be faithfully described without exaggeration (as we maintain they are), yet the acts, devices, and vagaries of such a creature as a Wild Man may, indeed must necessarily, be altogether eccentric and unparalleled. We, therefore, pause here to express a hope that, whatever credit you may be able to give to the

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reported deeds of this hero, you will not withhold your belief in the fidelity of the other portions of this narrative.

No sooner, then, were those unwelcome visitors ejected than Dick returned to the scene of devastation and shouted, "Hallo! Mary!"

"Safe, all safe," she replied, as, with the assistance of March Marston, she pushed the plank across the chasm, and returned to the centre cave.

"Is the lad March safe too?" inquired Dick, as he busied himself in striking a light with flint and steel.

"All right," answered the youth for himself, "but horribly battered, an' fit to yell with pain, not to mention surprise. Do look sharp and get the fire up. Sich doins' as this I never did see nor hear of since I left the frontier. I do declare it's worthy o' the Wild Man o' the West himself. What d'ye find to laugh at, Dick? I'm sure if ye had my miserable bones in yer body at this moment, ye'd laugh wi' your mouth screwed the wrong way. Look alive, man!"

"Patience, lad, patience. That's one o' the vartues, I believe; leastwise so I am told (ah, it's caught at last. Hand me that dry stuff on the south shelf, Mary; ye can find it i' the dark, I doubt not); yes, it's a vartue, but I can't boast o' having much o't myself: I dun know much about it from 'xperience; d'ye see? There, now, we'll git things put to rights," he added, apply-

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ing the kindled spark to some dry chips and producing a flame, with which he ignited a pine knot, and stuck it blazing in a cleft in the rock. "Just see what them reptiles ha' done to me. If it wasn't that I'm a good-tempered feller I b'lieve I'd git angry. See, March, boy, there's a shelf in the corner that's escaped the flood. Lie ye down there while Mary and me puts the place in order."

"I'd rather help you," said March, dismally. "I don't b'lieve it can make me worse, an', perhaps, it'll make me better. I wonder what in the world pain was made for."

"Ye'll only be in our way, lad. Lie down," said Dick, seizing a large broom and beginning to sweep away the water and ashes and pieces of charcoal with which the floor was plentifully covered, while Mary picked up the scattered skins and furniture of the cave, and placed them on the ledge of rock, about four feet from the ground, which Dick termed a shelf.

This ledge ran all round the apartment, so March selected a corner, and, throwing a dry skin upon it, stretched himself thereon, and soon found his sufferings relieved to such an extent that he began to question his host as to his sudden and unlooked-for return.

"How came ye to drop in upon us in the very nick o' time like that?" he said, gazing languidly at Mary, who bustled about with the activity

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of a kitten, or — to use an expression more in keeping with the surrounding circumstances — a wild kitten.

Dick, without checking his broom, told how he had discovered the tracks of the Indians, and returned at once, as has been related.

"Then," said March, looking anxiously at his host, "you'll not be able to help my poor comrades and the people at the Mountain Fort."

"It an't poss'ble to be in two places at once, no how ye can fix it," returned Dick, "else I'd ha' been there as well as here in the course of a few hours more."

"But should we not start off at once — now?" cried March, eagerly, throwing his legs off the ledge and coming to a sitting position.

"You an't able," replied Dick, quietly, "and I won't move till I have put things to rights here, an' had a feed an' a night's rest. If it would do any good, I'd start this minute. But the fight's over by this time — leastwise, it'll be over long afore we could get there! and if it's not to be a fight at all, why nobody's none the worse, d'ye see."

"But may-be they may hold the place for a long time," argued March, "an' the sudden appearance of you and me might turn the scale in their favor."

"So it might — so it might. I've thought o' that, and we'll start to-morrow, if yer able. But

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it would be o' no use to-night. My good horse can't run forever, right on end, without meat and rest."

"Then we'll start to-morrow," cried March, eagerly.

"Ay, if ye can mount and ride."

"That I have no fear of; but—but—" at that moment March's eye encountered Mary's—"but what about Mary?"

"Oh! she'll stop here till we come back. No fear o' redskins troublin' her again for some time," replied Dick, throwing down the broom and patting the girl's head. "Come, lass, let's have some supper. Show March what a capital cook ye are. I'll kindle a rousin' fire an' spread some pine branches round it to sit on, for the floor won't be quite dry for some time. What red reptiles, to be sure! and they was actually devourin' my poor old bay horse. What cannibals!"

In the course of an hour the cavern had resumed its former appearance of comfort. The ruddy glare of the fire fell warmly on the rocky walls and on the curling smoke, which found egress through the hole near the roof that let in light during the day. Branches were spread on the floor, so as to form a thick pile near the fire, and on the top of this sat the Wild Man of the West with the most amiable of smiles on his large, handsome countenance, and most benignant of

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expressions beaming in his clear blue eye, as he gazed first at Mary, who sat on his right hand, then at March, who sat on his left, and then at the iron pot which sat or stood between his knees, and into which he was about to plunge a large wooden ladle.

"There's worse things than buffalo-beef-bergoo, March, an't there? Ha, ha! my lad, tuck that under yer belt, it'll put the sore bones right faster than physic. Mary, my little pet lamb, here's a marrow-bone; come, yer growin', an' ye can't grow right if ye don't eat plenty o' meat and marrow-bones; there," he said, placing the bone in question on her pewter plate. "Ah! Mary, lass, ye've bin mixin' the victuals. Why, what have we here?"

"Moose nose," replied the girl, with a look of pleasure.

"I do b'lieve — so it is! why where got ye it? I han't killed a moose for three weeks an' more."

"Me kill him meself," said Mary.

"You!"

"Ay, me! with me own gun, too!"

"Capital!" cried Dick, tossing back his heavy locks, and gazing at the child with proud delight. "Yer a most fit an' proper darter for the Wild — a — *ho!*" sneezed Dick, with sudden violence, while Mary glanced quickly up and opened her eyes very wide. "Whisst — to — a — hah! whew!

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wot a tickler! I raally think the mountain air's a-goin' to make me subjick to catchin' colds."

March took no notice of the remark. His attention was at that moment divided between Mary's eyes and a marrow-bone.

There is no accounting for the besotted stupidity at this time of March Marston, who was naturally quick-witted, unless upon the principle that prejudice renders a man utterly blind. A hundred glaring and obvious facts, incidents, words, and looks, ought to have enlightened him as to who his new friend Dick really was. But his mind was so thoroughly imbued, so saturated, with the preconceived notion of the Wild Man of the West being a huge, ferocious, ugly monster, all over red, or perhaps blue, hair, from the eyes to the toes, with canine teeth, and, very probably, a tail, that unintentional hints and suggestive facts were totally thrown away upon him. The fact is, that if Dick had at that moment looked him full in the face and said, "*I'm* the Wild Man of the West," March would have said he didn't believe it!

"How came ye by the iron pot?" inquired March suddenly, as the sight of that vessel changed the current of his thoughts.

Dick's countenance became grave, and Mary's eyes dropped.

"I'll tell ye some other time," said the former

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quietly; "not now — not now. Come, lad, if ye mean to mount and ride wi' me to-morrow, you'll ha' to eat heartier than that."

"I'm doing my best. Did you say it was *you* that shot the moose-deer, Mary?"

"Yes, it was me. Me go out to kill bird for make dinner, two day back, an' see the moose in one place where hims no can escape but by one way — narrow way — tree feets, not more, wide. Hims look to me — me's look to him. Then me climb up side of rocks so hims no touch me, but *must* pass below me quite near. Then me yell — horbuble yell! ("Ha!" thought March, "music, sweetest music, that yell!") an' hims run round in great fright! ("Oh, the blockhead," thought March) — but see hims no can git away, so hims rush past me! Me shoot in back of hims head, an' him drop."

"Huzza!" shouted Dick, in such a bass roar, that March involuntary started. "Well done, lass; ye'll make a splendid wife to a bold mountaineer."

March could not believe his eyes, while he looked at the modest little creature who thus coolly related the way in which she slaughtered the moose; but he was bound to believe his ears, for Mary *said* she did the deed, and to suppose it possible that Mary could tell a falsehood was, in March's opinion, more absurd than to suppose that the bright sun could change itself into

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melted butter! But Dick's enthusiastic reference to Mary one day becoming the wife of a mountaineer startled him. He felt, that in the event of such a calamitous circumstance happening, she could no longer be his sister, and the thought made him first fierce, and then sulky.

"D'ye kill many mountain sheep here, Dick?" inquired March, when his ruffled temper had been smoothed down with another marrow-bone.

"Ay, lots of 'em."

"What like are they close? I've never been nearer to 'em yet than a thousand yards or so — never within range."

"They're 'bout the size of a settlement sheep, an' skin somethin' like the red-deer; ye've seen the red-deer, of coorse, March?"

"Yes, often; shot em too."

"Well, like them; but they've got most treemendous horns. I shot one last week with horns three fut six inches long; there they lie now in that corner. Are ye a good shot, March?"

"Middlin'."

"D'ye smoke?"

"Yes, a little; but I an't a slave to it like some."

"Humph!" ejaculated Dick, sarcastically. "If ye smoke 'a little,' how d'ye know but ye may come to smoke much, an' be a slave to it like other men? Ye may run down a steep hill, an' say, when yer near the top, 'I can stop when I

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like;' but ye'll come to a pint, lad, when ye'll try to stop an' find ye can't — when ye'd give all ye own to leave off runnin', but ye'll have to go on faster an' faster till yer carried off yer legs, and, mayhap, dashed to bits at the bottom. Smokin' and drinkin' are both alike. Ye can begin when you please, an' up to a certain pint, ye can stop when ye please; but after that pint, ye *can't* stop o' yer own free will — ye'd die first. Many an' many a poor fellow *has* died first, as I know."

"An' pray, Mister Solomon, do *you* smoke?" inquired March, testily, thinking that this question would reduce his companion to silence.

"No, never."

"Not smoke!" cried March, in amazement. The idea of a trapper not smoking was to him a thorough and novel incomprehensibility.

"No; nor drink neither," said Dick. "I once did both, before I came to this part o' the country, and I thank the Almighty for bringing me to a place where it warn't easy to get either drink or baccy — specially drink, which I believe would have laid me under the sod long ago, if I had bin left in a place where I could ha' got it. An' now, as Mary has just left us, poor thing, I'll tell ye how I came by the big iron pot. There's no mystery about it; but as it b'longed to the poor child's father, I didn't want to speak about it before her."

Dick placed an elbow on each knee, and, rest-

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ing his forehead upon his hands, stared for some moments into the fire ere he again spoke.

"It's many years now," said he, in a low sad tone, "since I left home, and — but that's nothin' to do wi' the pint," he added quickly. "You see, March, when I first came to this part o' the world I fell in with a comrade — a trapper — much to my likin'. This trapper had been jilted by some girl, and came away in a passion, detarminin' never more to return to his native place. I never know'd where he come from, nor the partic'lars of his story, for that was a pint he would never speak on. I don't believe I ever know'd his right name. He called himself Adam; that was the only name I ever know'd him by.

"Well, him an' me became great friends. He lived wi' a band of Pawnee Injuns, and had married a wife among them; not that she was a pure Injun neither, she was a half-breed. My Mary was their only child; she was a suckin' babe at that time. Adam had gin her no name when we first met, an' I remember him askin' me one day what he should call her; so I advised Mary — an' that's how she come to git the name.

"Adam an' me was always together. We suited each other. For myself, I had ta'en a skunner at mankind, an' womankind too; so we lived wi' the Pawnees, and hunted together, an' slep' together when out on the tramp. But one o' them reptiles took a spite at him, an'

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tried by every way he could to raise the Injuns agin' him, but couldn't; so he detarmined to murder him.

"One day we was out huntin' together, an" being too far from the Pawnee lodges to return that night, we encamped in the wood, an' biled our kettle—this iron one ye see here. Adam had a kind o' likin' for't, and always carried it at his saddle-bow when he went out o' horseback. We'd just begun supper, when up comes the Wild-cat, as he was called—Adam's enemy—an' sits down beside us.

"Of course, we could not say we thought he was up to mischief, though we suspected it, so we gave him his supper, an' he spent the night with us. Nixt mornin' he bade us good day, an' went off. Then Adam said he would go an' set beaver-traps in a creek about a mile off. Bein' lazy that day, I said I'd lie a bit in the camp. So away he went. The camp was on a hill. I could see him all the way, and soon saw him in the water settin' his traps.

"Suddenly I seed the Wild-cat step out o' the bushes with a bow an' arrow. I knew what was up. I gave a roar that he might have heard ten miles off, an' ran toward them. But an arrow was in Adam's back before he could git to the shore. In a moment more he had the Injun by the throat, an' the two struggled for life. Adam could ha' choked him easy, but the arrow in his back let

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out the blood fast, an' he could barely hold his own. Yet he strove like a true man. I was soon there, for I nearly burst my heart in that race. They were on the edge of the water. The Wild-cat had him down, and was tryin' to force him over the bank.

"I had my big sword wi' me, an' hewed the reptile's head off with it at one blow, sendin' it into the river, an' tossin' the body in after it.

"'It's too late,' says Adam, as I laid him softly on the bank.

"I could see that. The head of the shaft was nearly in his heart. He tried to speak, but could only say, 'Take care o' my wife an' Mary,—then he died, and I buried him there."

Dick paused, and clenched both hands convulsively as the thought of that black day came back upon him. But the glare in his eye soon melted into a look of sadness.

"Well, well," he continued, "it's long past now. Why should I be angry with the dead? Adam's wife never got the better o' that. She dropped her head like a prairie flower in the first blast of winter, an' was soon beside her husband.

"I waited till the little child could stump about on its own legs, an' then I mounted my horse an' rode away with it in my arms. The only things belongin' to poor Adam I brought with me was the iron pot an' his long rifle. There the rifle stands in the corner. I've used it ever since."

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"And have you and Mary lived here all alone since that day?"

"Ay. I came straight here — not carin' where I went, only anxious to get out o' the sight o' men, an' live alone wi' the child. I sought out a dwellin' in the wildest part o' these mountains, an' fell upon this cave where we've lived happy enough together."

"Do ye mean to say the child has never played with other children?" inquired March, amazed at this discovery.

"Not much. I give her a run for a month or two at a time, now an' agin, when I fall on a friendly set o' well-disposed redskins—just to keep the right sort o' spirit in her, and comfort her a bit. But she's always willin' to live alone wi' me."

"Then she's never learned to read?" said March, sadly.

"That has she. She's got one book. It's a story about a giant an' a fairy, an' a prince an' princess. Most 'xtraornar' stuff. I got it from a Blood Injun, who said he picked it up in a frontier settlement where the people had all been murdered. When we had nothin' better to do, I used to teach her her letters out o' that book, an' the moment she got 'em off she seemed to pick up the words I dun' know how. She's awful quick. She knows every word o' that story by heart. An' she's invented heaps o' others o' the most

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amazin' kind. I've often thought o' goin' to the settlements to git her some books, but——"

Dick paused abruptly, and a dark frown settled on his features, as if the thoughts of civilized men and things revived unpleasant memories.

"The fact is, he continued somewhat bitterly, "I've been a hater of my race. You'd scarce believe it, lad, but you are the first man I've ever told all this to. I can't tell why it is that I feel a likin' for ye, boy, an' a desire to have ye stop with me. But that must not be. I had but one friend. I must not make another to have him murdered, mayhap, before my eyes. Yet," he added, in a gentle tone, taking March's hand in his, and stroking it, "I feel a likin' for ye, boy, that makes me sad to think o' partin'."

"But we don't need to part, Dick," said March, eagerly. "I like you too, and I like your style of life, an'——." He was going to have added that he liked Mary, and that he would live with them both all his days, when the little cottage at Pine Point settlement and his loving mother rose before him, and caused him to drop his head and terminate his speech abruptly.

Just then Mary reëntered the cavern, and put an end to the conversation.

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CHAPTER XXI.

March, though Willing in Spirit, finds his Body weak. — He makes Mary a Present. — The Trappers set out to search for their Lost Comrade. — An Unexpected Meeting. — Big Waller waxes Pugnacious. — News of March. — Dick becomes more Mysterious than ever. — A Reckless Proposal and a Happy Meeting.

NEXT morning before daybreak, March Marston attempted to set out for the Mountain Fort with Dick; but he was so thoroughly knocked up before the end of the first mile that he had to call a halt, and admit that he could not think of going further. This was just what Dick wanted; so he laughed, told him to go back and take care of Mary, and he would advance alone.

March returned, very much humbled, excessively pained in all his joints, and feeling as if he had reason to be ashamed of himself.

"Oh! you com back?" cried Mary, as he entered the cavern with a crest-fallen air. "Me so glad! Me know very well you was no poss'ble for travel."

Mary was perfectly artless. She made no attempt whatever to conceal her satisfaction at the youth's return, so he felt amazingly com-

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forted, and even began to recover his self-esteem. "Yes, Mary, I've come back, 'cause I can't go forward. It's o' no use tryin'; I'd just have knocked up on the way, which would have been awkward for Dick, you know, as well as for me. Besides, I couldn't fight just now to save my life."

"Well, you is right. You stop here an' git strong an' well. Me tell you stories 'bout Dick, or other mans if you likes. We'll have no fightin' to do. If there is, me take care of you. Me can doos a littil in that way."

March opened his eyes very wide at this, and stared at the pretty little vision in leather, but there was no smile or sly wrinkle on her countenance. She was looking quite gravely and sedately into the iron pot, which she happened to be stirring at that moment.

"Mary," he said, sitting down beside her, "Dick tells me you can read."

"Yis, me can read littil. But me only got one book." She sighed slightly as she said this.

"Would you like to have another book?"

"Oh yis, very very much. Have you got one?"

"Ay, one; the only one I have in the world, Mary; an' you're the only person in the world I'd give it to. But I'll give it to you, 'cause you've no chance of gettin' one like it here. It's a Bible — the one my mother gave me when I left home."

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March pulled the little volume out of the breast of his coat as he spoke, and handed it to the girl, who received it eagerly, and looked at it with mingled feelings of awe and curiosity for some time before she ventured to open it.

"The Bibil. Dick have oftin speak to me 'bout it, an' try to 'member some of it. But he no can 'member much. He tell me it speak about the great good Spirit. Injins call him Manitow."

"So it does, Mary. I'll leave it with you when I go away. You say Dick couldn't remember much of it; neither can I, Mary. More shame to me, for many an' many a time has my poor mother tried to make me learn it off by heart."

"You mother?" repeated Mary, earnestly. "Is you mother livin'?"

"That is she. At least, I left her well an' hearty in Pine Point settlement not many weeks agone."

"Me wish me had mother," said Mary, with a sigh.

March gazed at the sad face of his fair companion with a perplexed yet sympathetic look. This was a new idea to him. Never having been without a mother, it had never entered into his head to think of such a thing as wishing for one.

"What you mother called?" said the girl, looking up quickly.

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"Her name is Mary."

"Yis! that very strange. Call same as me."

"Not very strange, after all. There are a good number of Marys in the world," replied March, with a laugh. "See here is her name on the fly-leaf of the Bible, written with her own hand too: 'To my dear March, from his loving mother, Mary Marston, Pine Point settlement.' Isn't it a good round hand o' write?"

"Very pritty," replied Mary. But she had now begun to spell out the words of the book, which had at last fallen into her hands, and March could not again draw her into general talk; so he was fain to sit down and help her to read the Bible.

Leaving them thus occupied, we will now return to the trappers, three of whom, it will be remembered, — Bounce, Redhand, and Gibault, — had reached the Mountain Fort and given the alarm. Soon afterwards the Indians arrived there; but finding every thing in readiness to give them a warm reception, they retired at once, preferring to wait their opportunity rather than have a fair stand-up fight with the white men. About an hour after they had retired, Big Waller, Hawkswing, and the artist, came tearing toward the fort, and were at once admitted.

They had nothing new to tell. They had met together by accident, as the others had done, on nearing the fort, and would have been in sooner,

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had not Big Waller been obliged to take charge of poor Bertram, who, owing to the suddenness and violence of all these recent events in savage life, had got into a muddled condition of mind that rendered him peculiarly helpless. But they knew nothing of March Marston — they had expected to find him there before them.

As March was well mounted, and known to be well qualified to take care of himself, his non-arrival threw his friends into a state of the utmost anxiety and suspense. They waited a couple of hours, in order to give him a chance of coming in, hoping that he might have merely been detained by some trifling accident, such as having lost his way for a time. But when, at the end of that period, there was still no sign of him, they gave up all hope of his arriving, and at once set out to sweep the whole country round in search of him, vowing in their hearts that they would never return to Pine Point settlement without him if he were alive.

McLeod tried to persuade them to remain at the fort for a few days, but, feeling sympathy with them, he soon ceased to press the matter. As for the wretched chief of the fort, Macgregor, — the excitement of the recent transactions being over, — he had returned to his bosom friend, and bitterest enemy, the bottle, and was at that time lying in a state of drivelling idiotcy in his private chamber.

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A few days after quitting the fort, Bounce and Gibault, who chanced to be riding considerably in advance of their companions, halted on the top of a ridge and began to scan the country before them. In the midst of their observations, Bounce broke the silence with a grunt.

"Fat now?" inquired his companion.

"What now?" replied Bounce, contemptuously. "Use yer eyes now: d'ye see nothin'?"

"Non, no ting."

"That comes o' the want of obsarvation now," said Bounce, in a grave, reproachful tone. "Ye shouldn't ought to be so light-headed, lad. If ye was left to yer lone in them sort o' places, ye'd soon lose yer scalp. It's *obsarvation* as does it all, an' in yer partikler case, it's the want o' that same as doesn't do it, d'ye see?"

"Non vraiment, me shockable blind dis day; mais, p'raps, git more cliver de morrow," replied the good-humored Canadian, with a grin. "Fat you see?"

"I see futprints," replied Bounce, dismounting; "an' as futprints implies feet, an' feet indicates critters, human or otherwise, it becomes men wot be lookin' for a lost comrade to examine 'em with more nor or'nary care."

"Hah!" shouted Gibault, with unwonted energy. Look! voila! behold! Bounce, you hab great want of 'obsarvation.' See!"

Now it chanced that, while Bounce was on his

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knees, carefully turning over every leaf and blade of grass, his comrade, who remained on horseback, and kept gazing at the horizon, without any particular object in view, did suddenly behold an object coming towards them at full gallop. Hence the sudden outburst, and the succeeding exclamation from Bounce — "It's a hoss!"

"A hoss!" repeated Gibault. "Him be one buffalo; I see hims bump."

"The bump that ye see is neither more nor less than a man leanin' forard — it is."

At this moment the rest of the party rode up, and Redhand confirmed Bounce's opinion.

"There's only one, I guess, an' he's in a powerful hurry," observed Big Waller. "But we may as well be ready to fix his flint if he means to cut up rough."

He brought forward his gun as he spoke, and examined the priming.

"I b'lieve he's an evil spirit, I do," said Bounce; "wot a pace!"

"More like to de Wild Man of de Vest," observed Gibault.

"Think you so?" whispered Bertram in an anxious tone, with an involuntary motion of his hand to the pouch, in which lay that marvellous sketch-book of his.

"Think it's him?" said Redhand to Hawkswing.

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The Indian gave a slight grunt of assent.

But the strange horseman soon put all doubt on the point at rest by bearing down upon them like a whirlwind, his long hair, and tags, and scalp-locks, streaming in the wind, as usual. Dick had a distinct purpose in thus acting. He wished to terrify men, or, at least, to impress them with a wholesome dread of him, in order that he might simply be *let alone!*

He did not check his slashing pace until within four or five bounds of the party. Reining up so violently that he tore up the turf for a couple of yards under his horse's heels, he looked at the trappers with a grave, almost fierce expression, for a second or two.

"You come from the Mountain Fort?" he said.

"Yes," replied Redhand.

"All right there?"

"All right. The redskins threatened an attack, but we were too quick for 'em."

A gleam of satisfaction passed across Dick's face, as he added, "You've lost a comrade; han't ye?"

"We jist have," cried Big Waller, in surprise. "If you've seed him, I guess ye'd as well take us to his whereabouts."

"See you yonder pine?" said Dick, pointing back in the direction whence he had come. "One day's journey beyond that, as the crow

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flies, will bring ye to a valley, level and well watered, with plenty o' beaver in it. You'll find him there."

Without waiting a reply Dick turned to ride away.

"I say, stranger," cried Waller (Dick paused), "air you, or air you not, the Wild Man o' the West?"

"Wild fools of the West call me so," replied Dick, with a ferocious frown, that went far to corroborate the propriety of the cognomen in the opinion of the trappers.

"Wall, I tell 'ee wot it is, stranger, Wild Man or not, I guess you'll ha' to take us to our comrade yourself, for I'm inclined to opine that you know more about him than's good for ye; so if ye try to ride off, I'll see whether a ball — sixteen to the pound — 'll stop ye, for all yer bigness."

A grim smile curled Dick's moustache, as he replied, "If ye think that a trapper's word an't to be trusted, or that committin' murder 'll do yer comrade a service, here's your chance — fire away!"

Dick wheeled about and cantered coolly away into the thickest part of the forest, leaving the trappers gazing at each other in amazement. Bertram was the first to speak.

"Oh! why did you not delay him a few seconds longer? See, I have him here — all but the legs of his splendid charger."

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The others burst into a laugh.

"If ye've got the body all c'rect, it's easy to calculate the legs by the rules o' proportion, d'ye see?" observed Bounce.

"Come, lads, that's good news about March, anyhow," cried Redhand; "an' I'm of opinion that the Wild Man o' the West an't just so wild as people think. I, for one, will trust him. There's somethin' about the corner of a man's eye that tells pretty plain whether he's false or true. Depend on't we shall find March where he told us, so the sooner we set off the better."

Without waiting for a reply, Redhand urged his horse into a gallop, and, followed by his comrades, made for the valley indicated by the Wild Man.

Meanwhile, the Wild Man himself was already far ahead of them, keeping out of sight among the woods, and galloping nearly in the same direction,—for his cave lay not more than four miles from the valley in question. Being much better mounted than they, he soon left the trappers far behind him, and when night closed in he continued his journey, instead of halting to eat and take a few hours' rest, as they did. The consequence was, that he reached his cave several hours before the trappers arrived at the valley, where they expected to find their missing comrade.

Of course March was filled with surprise at this

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second unexpected return of Dick; but the latter relieved his mind by explaining, in an off-hand way, that he had met a man who had told him the Mountain Fort was all safe, and that his comrades also were safe, and wandering about in that part of the country in search of him. After a good deal of desultory conversation, Dick turned to his guest with a sad, serious air, and, fixing his large blue eyes on him, said, —

"March, lad, you an' me must part soon."

"Part!" exclaimed the youth in surprise, glancing at Mary, who sat opposite to him, embroidering a pair of mocassins.

"Ay, we must part. You'll be well enough in a day or two to travel about with yer comrades. Now, lad, I want ye to understand me. I've lived here, off and on, for the last fourteen or fifteen years — it may be more, it may be less; I don't well remember — an' I've niver suffered men to interfere wi' me. I don't want them, an' they don't want me."

He paused. There was a slight dash of bitterness in the tone in which the last words were uttered; but it was gone when he resumed, in his usual low and musical voice, —

"Now, although I chose to bring you to my cave, because I found ye a'most in a dyin' state, an' have let ye into one or two o' my secrets, — because I couldn't help it, seein' that I couldn't stop up yer eyes an' yer ears, — yet I don't choose

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to let yer comrades know any thing about me. They've no right to, an' *you* have no right to tell 'em; so, when ye meet 'em again ye mustn't talk about me or my cave, d'ye see?"

"Certainly," said March, who was both surprised and annoyed by this speech, "certainly you have a perfect right to command me to hold my tongue; and, seein' that you've bin so kind to me, Dick, I'm in duty bound to obey; but how can you ask me to put myself in such an awkward fix? You don't suppose I can make my comrades believe I've bin livin' on air or grass for some days past, an' they'll see, easy enough, that I've not bin in a condition to help myself. Besides, whatever your notions may be about truth, mine are of such a sort that they won't let me tell a parcel o' lies to please anybody."

"Far be it from me, boy, to ask ye to tell lies. You can tell yer comrades that you've bin took care of by a trapper as lives in a cave among the mountains; but you don't need to tell 'em where the cave is; an' if they worry ye to guide 'em to it, ye can refuse. Moreover, jist speak o' me in an off-hand, careless sort o' way, d'ye see, an' be particular not to tell what I'm like, 'cause it might make 'em take a fancy to hunt me up."

There appeared to be a dash of vanity in the latter part of this remark, which surprised March not a little; for it seemed to him quite inconsistent with the stout hunter's wonted modesty of demeanor and speech.

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"Well, I'm bound to think only o' your wishes in this matter," replied March, in a disappointed tone, "an' I'll do my best to prevent my comrades interfering with ye, tho', to say truth, I don't think you need be so cautious, for they ain't over-curious—none of 'em. But—" here March paused and glanced at Mary, who, he observed, had drooped her head very much during the conversation, and from whose eye at that moment a bright tear fell, like a diamond, on the work with which she was engaged.

"But—am I—the fact is, Dick, I feel a little sore that you should say ye had a likin' for me, an' then tell me I must be off, an' never look near ye again."

"That's wot I never did say, boy," returned Dick, smiling. "Ye may come *alone* to see me as often as ye like, while ye remain in these parts. An' if it please ye, yer at liberty to come an' live wi' me. There's room in the mountains for both of us. The cave can hold three if need be."

March Marston's heart beat quick. He was on the eve of forming a great resolve! His bosom heaved, and his eye sparkled, as he was about to close hastily with this proposal, when, again, the memory of his mother crossed him, and a deep sigh burst from his lips, as he shook his head, and said, sorrowfully, "It can't be done, Dick. I can't forsake my mother."

"No more ye should, lad, no more ye should,"

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said Dick, nodding approvingly, "but there's nothin' to prevent your spendin' the winter and spring here, an' returnin' to yer mother next summer."

"Done!" cried March, springing up as well as his bruised muscles would permit him, and seizing his friend enthusiastically by the hand, "I'll stop with you and send home word by my comrades that I'll be back in summer. That's capital!"

Mary seemed to be quite of the same opinion, for she looked quickly up with a beaming smile.

"Well, so it is a good plan," said Dick, somewhat gravely; "but don't act in haste, else ye may ha' to repent at leisure. Go an' speak to yer comrades, see what they advise ye to do, an' come again an' let me know. And, now we're on that pint, I may tell ye that yer friends will be at the head of a valley not four miles from here this very night, an' they expect ye there."

"How d'ye know that?" cried March, breathless with amazement.

"Well, ye see, the Wild Man o' the West knows that you're in them parts; he has seed you an' knows where ye are, an' he met yer comrades, the trappers, no later than yesterday, an' told 'em they'd find ye in the valley I spoke of just now; so we must be up an' away to meet 'em."

Dick rose as he spoke and began to make preparation to depart.

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"But how came *you* to know this?" inquired the astonished youth.

"Why, the Wild Man an' me's oncommon intimate, d'ye see. In fact, I may say we're jist inseparable companions, and so I come to know it that way. But make haste. We've no time to lose.

"Good-by, Mary," cried March with a cheerful smile, as he hurried out of the cave after his eccentric companion. "I'll be back before long, depend on't."

Mary nodded, and the two men were soon mounted and out of sight.

"I say, Dick," observed March, as they rode along, "you *must* get me to see the Wild Man of the West; if you're so intimate with him, you can easily bring him into the cave; now *won't* you, Dick?"

"Well, as I can't help doin' it, I s'pose I may say yes, at once."

"Can't help it, Dick! What mean you? I wish ye'd talk sense."

"Hist!" exclaimed the hunter, pulling up suddenly, under the shelter of a cliff. "Yonder come yer friends, sooner than I expected. I'll leave ye here. They've not seed us yit, an' that wood'll hide me till I git away. Now, March, he added, solemnly, "*remember yer promise.*"

In another moment the wild hunter was gone, and March rode forward to meet his old comrades,

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who, having now caught sight of him, came up the valley at full speed, shouting and waving their caps joyfully as they approached. In a shorter space of time than it takes to tell, March was surrounded, dragged off his horse, passed from one to another, to be handled roughly, in order to make sure that it was really himself, and, finally, was swallowed up by Bounce in a masculine embrace that might almost have passed for the hug of a grisly bear.

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CHAPTER XXII.

March Marston is perplexed, so are his Friends. — An unlooked-for Meeting. — Terrible News. — The Attack. — The Wild Man of the West once again renders signal Service to the Trappers. — Wild Doings in general, and March Marston's Chagrin in particular.

"MARCH MARSTON," said Bounce — and Bounce was sitting beside the camp-fire, smoking his pipe after supper when he said it — "you may think ye're a 'cute feller, you may, oncommon 'cute; but if you'll listen to what an oldish hunter says, an' take his advice, you'll come to think, in a feelosophical way, d'ye see, that you're not quite *so* 'cute as ye suppose."

Bounce delivered this oracularly, and followed it up with a succession of puffs, each of which was so solidly yellow as to suggest to the mind of Bertram, who chanced to be taking his portrait at that moment, that the next puff would burst out in pure flame. Gibault and Big Waller nodded their heads in testimony of their approval of the general scope of the remark; the latter even went the length of "guessing that it was a fact," and Redhand smiled. Hawkswing looked, if possible, graver than usual.

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"As," resumed Bounce, after a considerable pause, during which March looked and felt very uncomfortable, "the nat'ral eyes of old men becomes more dimmer, d'ye see? their mental eyes, so to speak, becomes sharper, so as that they can see through no end o' figurative millstones. That bein' the case when there's no millstone to be seen through at all, but only a oncommon thin trans—trans——"

"Ollification suggested Waller, modestly.

"Not at all," retorted Bounce, with much severity in his tone. "I *wos* goin' to have said —transparientsy; but I'll not say that now, seein' it's too feelosophical for the likes o' you; but, as I wos sayin', that bein' the case, dy'e see? it's quite plain that——"

Here, Bounce having got into depths unusually profound, even for his speculative and philosophical turn of mind, sought refuge in a series of voluminous puffs, and wound up, finally, with an emphatic assertion that "there wos somethin' wrong, an' it wos o' no manner o' use to try to throw dust in *his* eyes, seein' that his winkin' powers was sich as to enable him to keep it out, no matter how thick or fast it should come."

"Ah, that's yer sort! I calc'late you're floored there, March," said Waller, gravely. "The fact is, boy, that it won't do; you've got somethin' in the background that Mr. Bertram talks sich a heap about. You ought to be fair an' aboveboard with comrades, ye ought."

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"Oui," added Gibault. "Of course, you have live somewhere, an' somehow, all dis time. It am not posseeble for live nowhere on noting."

"Well, I tell you I have lived with a hunter, who treated me very well, and told me I'd find you here; having learned that, as I understand, from the Wild Man o' the West himself."

"Very true," said Bounce; "but where does the hunter live?"

"In the mountains," replied March.

"So does the Blackfeet an' the Peigans an' the Crows, an' the foxes an' wolves an' grisly bars," retorted Bounce, drily.

"I'll tell ye what it is," cried the exasperated March; "the curiosity of you fellers beats the squaws out an' out. Now, I'll be open with ye, an' then ye must hold yer tongues. This man that I've been stayin' with is a very fine fellow, an' a very wonderful fellow, an' his name's Dick ——"

"Dick what?" inquired Bounce.

"Dick nothing," said March.

"Ay! that's a odd name."

"No, I mean he's only called Dick, an' he wouldn't tell me his other name if he has one. Well, he said to me I was not to tell where he lived, as he don't like company, an' so he made me promise, an' I did promise, d'ye see; so I mean to stick to my promise, and that's all about it. I would like to tell ye about him, comrades,

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but you wouldn't have me break my word, would you?"

"Cer'nly not, by no means," said Bounce. "Does he live all by his lone?"

"No—eh—ah! Well, I fancy it's not breakin' my word to tell ye that—no, he's got a little gal, an adopted daughter, livin' with him."

"Is she good lookin'?" inquired Bounce, quickly, with a sharp glance at the youth.

March looked a little confused, and, in a hesitating manner, admitted that she was.

"Ah! I thought so," observed Bounce, gravely, shaking his head and looking unutterably profound, while Gibault gave a low whistle and winked to Big Waller, who returned the mystic signal with the addition of a knowing nod, all of which movements were observed by poor March, who became very red in the face, and felt very angry and remarkably uncomfortable, and quite unable to decide whether it was better to laugh or storm. He was saved from all further perplexity on this point, however, by the sudden appearance of a horseman on the distant plain, who seemed to be approaching the valley in which they were encamped. At first, he looked like a black speck or a crow on the horizon, and, in the uncertain light of the rapidly closing day, it would have been difficult for any unaccustomed eye to make out what the object was.

In a short time he drew near enough to be dis-

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tinguished clearly, and the rapid patter of the horse's hoofs on the turf told that the rider was flying over the ground at unusual speed. Passing round a clump of low trees that stretched out from the mouth of the valley into the plain, he came dashing toward the camp — a wild-looking, dishevelled creature, seemingly in a state of reckless insanity.

"The Wild Man again, surely," said Bounce, who, with his companions, had risen to await the coming up of the stranger.

"D'you think so?" cried March Marston, eagerly.

"Ye — eh! why, I do b'lieve it's Mr. Macgregor," cried the astonished Bounce, as the reckless rider dashed up to the camp-fire, and, springing from his horse, with a yell that savored more of a savage than a civilized spirit, cried —

"Look out, lads; up with a pile o' rocks an' trees! They'll be on us in a jiffy! There's five hundred o' the red reptiles if there's one. The Mountain Fort's burned to cinders — every man and woman dead and scalped — look alive!"

These words were uttered hastily, in broken exclamations, as Macgregor seized the logs that had been cut for fire-wood, and began violently to toss them together in a pile; while the trappers, although much amazed and horrified at the news, seized their hatchets and began to make instant preparation to resist an attack, without

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wasting time in useless questions. They observed that the commander of the Mountain Fort was pale as death, that his eyes were bloodshot, his clothes torn, and his hands and face begrimed with powder and stained with blood.

March Marston worked like a hero at the rude breastwork for some time, although the effort caused him so much pain that he could not help showing it in his countenance.

"March," said Bounce, seizing him suddenly by the shoulder, "you're not fit to work, an' much less fit to fight. I'll tell ye wot to do, lad. Jump on my horse, an' away to yer friend the trapper, an' bring him here to help us. One stout arm 'll do more good this night than ten battered bodies sich as yours, poor feller."

March felt the truth of this, so without delay, turned to obey. Just as he was about to leave he heard a deep groan, and turning round, saw Macgregor fall to the ground.

"You're ill," he cried, running to him and kneeling down.

"No — not ill, just a scratch from an arrow," gasped the trader, with an oath. "I believe the head's stickin' in my back."

"Away, March," cried Redhand, "we'll look to this. Waller, out wi' the fire, man; ye used to be more spry when — ah! too late, there they are, they've seen us."

"Into the fort, boys," cried Bounce, alluding to

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the breastwork, "we don't need to care; with plenty o' powder and lead we can keep five thousand redskins off."

March heard no more. Dashing up the glen at full speed, he disappeared from the spot, just as the distant yell of the savage host came floating upon the wings of the night air, apprising the trappers that their fire had been observed, and that they would have to fight manfully if they hoped to carry their scalps home with them.

In a few minutes the Indians drew near, and scattering themselves round the little entrenchment, began to discharge clouds of arrows at it, but, fortunately, without doing any damage. An inaccessible cliff protected their rear, and behind a projection of this the trappers' horses were secured. The breastwork lay immediately in front.

Again and again the savages let fly their shafts, but without drawing any reply from the trappers, who kept close under cover, and reserved their fire. This tempted their enemies to approach, and, when within short range, they seemed about to make a rush, supposing, no doubt, that the party concealed behind the breastwork must be Indians, since they did not use fire-arms. Just then Redhand gave a preconcerted signal; three sheets of flame spouted from their guns, and three of the foremost Indians fell dead from their horses.

With a terrible yell the others turned to fly,

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but before they had retreated a yard three more shots were fired with deadly effect. They now took shelter behind trees and rocks, and attempted to dislodge the trappers by discharging arrows into the air at such an angle that they should drop into their fortress. One or two endeavored to ascend the steep cliff, but the instant an arm or shoulder appeared, a ball from Red-hand's deadly rifle struck it, so the attempt was abandoned.

While this was going on, March Marston galloped to Dick's cave, and startled poor Mary not a little by the abruptness of his entrance. But, to his mortification, Dick was not at home. It so chanced that that wild individual had taken it into his head to remain concealed in the woods near the spot where he had parted from his late guest, and had not only witnessed the meeting of March with his friends, but had seen the arrival of Macgregor, the subsequent departure of March in the direction of the cave, and the attack made by the Indians. When, therefore, the youth was speeding toward his cavern, the Wild Man (who was not sorry to see him go off on such an errand), was busily planning the best mode of attacking the enemy so as to render effectual aid to the trappers.

Observing that the Indians had clustered together at the foot of a rugged cliff, apparently for the purpose of holding a council of

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war, Dick made his way quickly to the summit of the cliff, and, leaving his charger on an eminence that sloped down toward the entrance of the valley, quickly and noiselessly carried several huge stones to the edge of the precipice, intending to throw them down on the heads of his foes. Just as he was about to do so, he observed an overhanging mass of rock, many tons in weight, which the frosts of winter had detached from the precipice. Placing his feet against this, and leaning his back against the solid rock, he exerted himself with all his might, like a second Samson. No human power could have moved such a rock, had it not been almost overbalanced; but, being so, Dick's effort moved it. Again he strained, until the great veins seemed about to burst through the skin of his neck and forehead. Gradually the rock toppled and fell, and the Wild Man fell along with it.

In the agony of that moment he uttered a cry so terrible that it might well have been supposed to have come from the throat of a supernatural being. The Indians had not time to evade the danger. The ponderous mass in its descent hit a projecting crag, and burst into smaller fragments, which fell in a rattling shower, killing two men, and wounding others. Those of the group who escaped, as well as those who chanced to be beyond the danger, saw, by the dim moonlight, the Wild Man of the West descending, as it were,

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like a furious demon in the midst of the dire confusion of dust and rocks. They knew him well. It wanted but this to fill them to overflow with superstitous dread. They turned and fled. The trappers, although amazed beyond measure, and half suspecting who it was that had thus suddenly come to their aid, mounted their horses, and, leaping over their barricade, rushed down the valley in pursuit, firing a volley at starting, and loading as they rode at full speed. In his descent Dick made what might well be termed a miraculous escape. Near the foot of the cliff he went crashing through a thick bush, which broke his fall. Still he retained impetus sufficient to have seriously injured if not killed him, had he not alighted in the midst of another bush which saved him so completely that he was not even hurt.

Dick could scarcely believe his own senses; but he was not a man given to indulge much wandering thought in times of action. Giving himself one shake, to make sure of his being actually sound in wind and limb, he bounded away up the precipice by a path with which he was well acquainted, reached his horse, flew by a short cut to the mouth of the valley, and, wheeling suddenly round, met the horrified Indians in the very teeth!

The roar with which he met them was compound in its nature, and altogether hideous! His

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mind was in a mingled condition of amazement and satisfaction at his escape, triumph at the success of his plan, and indignation at the cowardly wickedness of the savages. A rollicking species of mad pugnacity took possession of him, and the consequence was, that the sounds which issued from his leathern throat were positively inhuman.

The rushing mass of terror-stricken men, thus caught, as it were, between two fires, divided, in order to escape him. Dick was not sorry to observe this. He felt that the day was gained without further bloodshed. He knew that the superstitious dread in which he was held was a guarantee that the savages would not return; so, instead of turning with the trappers to join in the pursuit, he favored them with a concluding and a peculiarly monstrous howl, and then rode quietly away by a circuitous route to his own cavern.

Thus he avoided March Marston, who on finding that his friend Dick was out, had returned at full speed to aid his comrades, and arrived just in time to meet them returning, triumphant and panting, from their pursuit of the foe!

"Are they gone?" cried March in amazement.

"Ay, right slick away into the middle o' no whar," replied Big Waller, laughing heartily. "Did ye iver hear such a roarer, comrades?"

"Have you licked 'em out an' out?" continued the incredulous March.

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"Ay, out an' out, an' no mistake," replied Bounce, dismounting.

"Well, that *is* lucky," said March; "for my friend Dick I found was not——"

"Ah! we not have need him," interrupted Gibault, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, "de Wild Man of de West hims come, an' — oh! you should see what hims have bin do!"

"The Wild Man again?" exclaimed March in dismay — "an' me absent!"

Gibault nodded and laughed.

At that moment an exclamation from Redhand attracted the attention of the whole party. He was kneeling beside Macgregor, who had dismounted and lain down.

"I believe they've done for me," said the fur-trader faintly. "That arrow must have gone deeper than I thought."

"You'd better let me see the wound, sir," said Redhand, "your shirt is covered with blood."

"No, no," said the wounded man, savagely; "let me rest — see, I'm better now. You will find a flask in the bag at my saddle-bow. Bring it here."

"I know that Dick — the hunter — is a good hand at doctoring," said March. "What a pity he is not here. We might carry you there, sir."

"Carry me," laughed the fur-trader fiercely; "no, I'll never be carried till I'm carried to my grave. How far off is his place? Where stays he?"

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"Four miles from this. I'll take you if you can ride," said March.

"Ay, that I can, bravely," cried the trader, who, having taken a deep draught of spirits, seemed to be imbued with new life. "Come, young sir, mount."

The trappers endeavored to dissuade the violent man from the attempt, but he could not be controlled; so March, hastily observing that he would see him safe to the hunter's abode and return without delay, mounted his horse and rode away, followed by the wounded man.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

The Wounded Fur-Trader.

WHEN they reached the entrance to the cavern, March and his companion dismounted; but the latter was so weak from loss of blood that he stumbled at the foot of the track, and fell to the earth insensible.

March ran hastily in for assistance, and was not a little surprised to find Dick sitting alone by the side of the fire, and so absorbed in the perusal of a little book that he had not noticed his entrance — a very singular and unaccountable piece of absence of mind in one so well trained in the watchful ways of the backwoods.

"Ho! Dick!" cried the youth.

"What, March — March Marston!" exclaimed the Wild Man, springing up, seizing him by the shoulders, and gazing intently into his face, as if to assure himself that he was not dreaming.

"Ay, no doubt I'm March Marston; though how you came to find out my name I don't know ——"

"Easy enough that, lad, when you leave your mother's Bible behind ye," cried Dick, with a wild laugh. "She must be a good mother that o' yours. Is she alive yet, boy?"

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"That is she, an' well, I trust ——"

"An' your father," interrupted Dick; "how's he, lad, eh?"

"I don't know," said March, frowning; "he forsook us fourteen years agone; but its little good talking o' such matters now, when there's a poor fellow dyin' outside."

"Dyin'?"

"Ay, so it seems to me. I've brought him to see if ye can stop the bleedin', but he's fainted, and I can't lift ——"

Dick waited for no more, but, hastening out, raised McGregor in his arms, and carried him into the inner cave, where Mary was lying sound asleep on her lowly couch.

"Come, Mary, lass, make way for this poor feller."

The child leaped up, and, throwing a deer-skin round her, stepped aside to allow the wounded man to be placed on her bed. Her eye immediately fell on March, who stood in the entrance, and she ran to him in surprise.

"What's de matter, March?"

"Hush, Mary," said Dick, in a low voice; "we'll have to speak soft. Poor Macgregor won't be long for this world, I'm affeared. Fetch me the box o' things."

"You know him, then?" whispered March, in surprise.

"Ay, I've often bin to the Mountain Fort and

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seed him there. See, he's comin' to. Put that torch more behind me, lad. It'll be better for him not to see me."

As he spoke the wounded man sighed faintly. Opening his eyes, he said, "Where am I?"

"Speak to him," whispered Dick, looking over his shoulder at March, who advanced, and, kneeling at the side of the couch, said:

"You're all right, Mr. Macgregor. I've brought you to the hunter's home. He'll dress your wound and take care of you; so make your mind easy. But you'll have to keep quiet. You've lost much blood."

The fur-trader turned round and seemed to fall asleep, while Dick bound his wounds, and then, leaving him to rest, he and March returned to the other cave.

During that night Dick seemed in an unaccountably excited state. Sometimes he sat down by the fire and talked with March, in an absent manner, on all kinds of subjects—his adventures, his intentions, his home at Pine Point; but from his looks it seemed as if his thoughts were otherwise engaged, and occasionally he started up and paced the floor hurriedly, while his brows darkened and his broad chest heaved as though he were struggling with some powerful feeling or passion.

"Could it be," thought March, "that there was some mysterious connection between Dick

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and the wounded fur-trader?" Not being able to find a satisfactory reply to the thought, he finally dismissed it, and turned his attentions altogether toward Mary, whose looks of surprise and concern showed that she, too, was puzzled by the behavior of her adopted father.

During that night and all the next day the wounded man grew rapidly worse, and March stayed with him, partly because he felt a strong interest in and pity for him, and partly because he did not like to leave to Mary the duty of watching a dying man.

Dick went out during the day in the same excited state, and did not return till late in the evening. During his absence, the dying man's mind wandered frequently, and, in order to check this as well as to comfort him, March read to him from his mother's Bible. At times he seemed to listen intently to the words that fell from March's lips, but more frequently he lay in a state apparently of stupor.

"Boy," said he, starting suddenly out of one of those heavy slumbers, "what's the use of reading the Bible to me? I'm not a Christian, an' it's too late now — too late!"

"The Bible tells me that '*now*' is God's time. I forget where the words are, an' I can't find 'em," said March earnestly; "but I *know* they're in this book. Besides, don't you remember the thief who was saved when he hung on the cross in a dyin' state?"

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The fur-trader shook his head slowly, and still muttered, "Too late, too late."

March now became deeply anxious about the dying man, who seemed to him like one sinking in the sea, yet refusing to grasp the rope that was flung to him. He turned over the sacred pages hurriedly to find appropriate texts, and blamed himself again and again for not having made himself better acquainted with the Word of God. He also repeated all he could think of from memory; but still the dying man shook his head and muttered, "Too late." Suddenly March bent over him and said:

"Christ is able to save to the *uttermost* all who come unto God through Him."

The fur-trader looked up in silence for a few seconds. "Ay," said he, "many a time have I heard the old minister at Pine Point say that."

"Pine Point!" exclaimed March, in surprise.

"Perhaps they're true, after all," continued Macgregor, not noticing the interruption. "Oh Mary, Mary! surely I did the uttermost when I forsook ye. Let me see the words, boy; are they there?"

A strange suspicion flashed suddenly on the mind of March as he listened to these words, and he trembled violently as he handed him the book.

"What—what's this? Where got ye my wife's Bible? You must" (he added between his teeth,

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in a sudden burst of anger) have murdered my boy."

"Father!" exclaimed March, seizing Macgregor's hand.

The dying man started up with a countenance of ashy paleness, and, leaning on one elbow, gazed earnestly into the youth's face — "March! can it be my boy?" — he fell back with a heavy groan. The bandages had been loosened by the exertion, and blood was pouring freely from his wound. The case admitted of no delay. March hurriedly attempted to stop the flow of the vital stream, assisted by Mary, who had been sitting at the foot of the couch bathed in tears during the foregoing scene.

Just then Dick returned, and, seeing how matters stood, quickly stanched the wound; but his aid came too late. Macgregor, or rather Obadiah Marston, opened his eyes but once after that, and seemed as if he wished to speak. March bent down quickly and put his ear close to his mouth; there was a faint whisper, "God bless you, March, my son," and then all was still.

March gazed long and breathlessly at the dead countenance; then, looking slowly up in Dick's face, he said, pointing to the dead man, "My father!" and fell insensible on the couch beside him.

We will pass over the first few days that succeeded the event just narrated, during which

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March Marston went about the wild region in the vicinity of the cave like one in a dream. It may be imagined with what surprise the trappers learned from him the near relationship that existed between himself and the fur-trader. They felt and expressed the deepest sympathy with their young comrade, and offered to accompany him when he laid his father in the grave. But Dick had firmly refused to allow the youth to bring the trappers near his abode, so they forebore to press him, and the last sad rites were performed by himself and Dick alone. The grave was made in the centre of a little green vale which lay like an emerald in the heart of that rocky wilderness; and a little wooden cross, with the name and date cut thereon by March, was erected at the head of the low mound to mark the fur-trader's last lonely resting-place. March Marston had never known his father in early life, having been an infant when he deserted his family; and the little that he had seen of him at the Mountain Fort, and amid the wild scenes of the Rocky Mountains, had not made a favorable impression on him. But, now that he was gone, the natural instinct of affection arose within his breast. He called to remembrance the last few and sad hours which he had spent by his parent's dying bed. He thought of their last few words on the momentous concerns of the soul, and of the eagerness with which, at

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times, the dying man listened to the life-giving Word of God; and the tear of sorrow that fell upon the grave as he turned to quit that solitary spot, was mingled with a tear of joy and thankfulness that God had brought him there to pour words of comfort and hope into his father's dying ear.

That night he spent in the cave with Dick; he felt indisposed to join his old comrades just then. The grave tenderness of his eccentric friend, and the sympathy of little Mary were more congenial to him.

"March," said Dick, in a low sad tone, as they sat beside the fire, "that funeral reminds me o' my friend I told ye of once. It's a lonesome grave his, with nought but a wooden cross to mark it."

"Had you known him long, Dick?"

"No, not long. He left the settlement in a huff — bein', I b'lieve, crossed in love, as I told ye."

Dick paused, and clasping both hands over his knee, gazed with a look of mingled sternness and sorrow at the glowing fire.

"Did ye ever," he resumed, abruptly, "hear o' a feller called Louis, who once lived at Pine Point — before ye was born, lad; did ye ever hear yer mother speak of him?"

"Louis? Yes — well; I believe I do think I've heard the name before. Oh, yes! People

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used to say he was fond o' my mother when she was a girl; but I never heard her speak of him. Now ye mention it, I remember the only time I ever asked her about it, she burst into tears and told me never to speak of him again. Thadwick was his name — Louis Thadwick; but he was better known as Louis the Trapper. But he's almost forgotten at the settlement now, it's so long ago. Every one thinks him dead. Why d'ye ask?"

"Think he's dead?" repeated Dick, slowly. "An' why not? My poor friend that was killed when he left his native place swore he'd never go back, an' no more he did — no more he did; though he little thought that death would step in so soon to make him keep his word."

"Was Louis your friend who died?" inquired March, with much interest and not a little pity; for he observed that his companion was deeply affected.

Dick did not reply. His thoughts seemed to be wandering again, so March forebore to interrupt him, and, turning to Mary, said in a more cheerful tone: —

"Whether would ye like to go to Pine Point settlement and stay with my mother, or that I should come here and spend the winter with you and Dick?"

Mary looked puzzled, and after some moments' consideration replied, "Me don't know." Then,

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looking up quickly, she added, "Which *you* like?"

"Indeed, I must make the same reply, Mary, —'I don't know.' But, as I can't expect my friend Dick to give up his wild life, I suppose I must make up my mind to come here."

"March, said Dick, quickly, "I've changed my mind, lad. It won't do. You'll have to spend next winter at home — any how ye can't spend it with me."

Had a thunderbolt struck the earth between March and Mary, they would not have been filled with half so much consternation as they were on hearing these words. It was plain that both had thoroughly made up their minds that they were to be together for many months to come. Dick noted the effect of his remark, and a peculiar frown crossed his countenance for a moment, but it gave place to a smile, as he said, —

"I'm sorry to disappoint ye, lad; but the thing cannot be."

"Cannot be!" repeated March, in a tone of exasperation, for he felt that this was an unwarrantable piece of caprice on the part of his friend; "surely you don't claim to be chief of the Rocky Mountains! If I choose to come an' spend the winter in this region, you have no right to prevent me. And if I offer to bring you furs and venison, besides pretty good company, will ye be such a surly knave as to refuse me a corner of your cave."

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"Nay, lad. Right-welcome would ye be, with or without furs or venison; but I mean to leave the cave — to quit this part of the country altogether. The fact is, I'm tired of it, an' want a change."

"Very good, all right, an' what's to hinder my going with you? I'm fond o' change myself. I'd as soon go one way as another."

Dick shook his head. "It's o' no use, March, I've my own reasons for desirin' to travel alone. The thing cannot be."

This was said in such a decided tone that March looked at Mary in dismay. He gathered no consolation from her countenance, however.

"March," said Dick, firmly, "I'm sorry to grieve ye, lad, but it can't be helped. All I can say is, that if ye choose to come back here next summer you'll be heartily welcome, and I'll engage that ye'll find me here; but I'm quite sartin' ye won't want to come."

"Won't want to come! I'll bet ye a hundred thousand million dollars I'll want to come, ay, and *will* come," cried March.

"Done!" said Dick, seizing the youth's hand, "an' Mary's a witness to the wager."

It is needless to say that the conversation did not rest here. The greater part of that night, and during great part of the week that March remained there, he continued to press the Wild Man of the West to alter his purpose, but without avail.

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Each day he passed with his comrades, hunting and trapping, and each night he bade them adieu and returned to sup and sleep in the cave, and of course, persecuted Dick all that time; but Dick was immovable.

Of course, the trappers renewed their attempts to get March to show them Dick's abode, but he persistently refused, and they were too good-natured to annoy him, and too honest to follow his trail, which they might easily have done, had they been so disposed.

At last the time arrived when it became necessary that the trappers should return to Pine Point settlement. In the midst of all their alarms and fights they had found time to do, what Big Waller termed, a "pretty considerable stroke o' business." That is to say, they had killed a large number of fur-bearing animals by means of trap, snare, and gun, so that they were in a position to return home with a heavy load of valuable skins. The day of their departure was therefore arranged, and March, mounting his steed, galloped, for the last time, and with a heavy heart, toward the cave of his friend Dick.

As he passed rapidly over the wild country, and entered the gloomy recesses that surrounded the Wild Man's home, he thought over the arguments and persuasive speeches with which he meant to make a last, and, he still hoped, successful appeal. But March might have spared

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himself the trouble of all this though, for when he reached the cave Dick was absent. This grieved him deeply, because every preparation had been made by his companions for starting on their homeward journey that evening, so that he had no time to spare.

Mary was at home, however, so March felt a little consoled, and, seating himself in his wonted place beside the fire, he said:—

"When will Dick be home, Mary?"

"Me no' can know 'zactly. To-morray hims say, perhaps."

"Then it's all up," sighed March, leaning recklessly back against the wall, "all up! I'm off to-night, so I'll not be able to spend the winter with you after all."

Had Mary burst into tears on hearing this, March would have felt satisfied. Had she groaned or sobbed, or even sighed, he would have experienced some degree of relief to his annoyed and disappointed spirit, but when Mary, instead of any such demonstration, hung down her head so that the heavy masses of her soft brown hair hid her pretty face and said, in a tone which March fancied was not very genuine — "What a pity," he became extremely exasperated and deemed himself ill-used.

During the half hour that succeeded he endeavored to converse in a pleasant tone of voice, but without success. At last he rose to go.

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"Must you go 'way dis night?" said Mary, with a look of concern."

"Ay, Mary, an' it's not much matter, for ye don't seem to care."

The girl looked at him reproachfully, "You is not please' with me, March — why?"

The question puzzled the youth. He certainly was displeased, but he could not make up his mind to say that he was so because Mary had not fallen into a state of violent grief at the prospect of a separation. But the anxious gaze of Mary's truthful blue eyes was too much for him, — he suddenly grasped both her hands, and, kissing her forehead, said: —

"Mary, dear, I'm not displeased. I'm only sorry, and sad, and annoyed, and miserable — very miserable — I can scarcely tell why. I suppose I'm not well, or I'm cross, or something or other. But this I know, Mary, Dick has invited me to come back to see him next year, and I certainly shall come if life and limb hold out till then."

Mary's eyes filled with tears, and as she smiled through them, March, being very near her face, beheld in each eye an excessively miniature portrait of himself gazing out at him lovingly.

"Perhaps!" faltered Mary, "you no' want for come when it be nixt year."

Poor March was overwhelmed again, abso-

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lutely disgusted, that *she* could entertain a doubt upon that point!

"We shall see," he cried, with a sudden impulse, pressing his lips again to her forehead. "May the Great Spirit bless and keep you. Good-by, Mary, — till next spring."

March burst away from her, rushed out of the cave in a tumult of conflicting feelings and great resolves, and despite a little stiffness that still remained to remind him of his late accident, flung himself into the saddle with a bound that would have done credit to the Wild Man himself, and galloped down the rocky gorge at a pace that threatened a sudden and total smash to horse and man. Had any of his old comrades or friends witnessed that burst, they would certainly have said that March Marston was mad, — madder, perhaps, than the most obstreperous March-hare that ever marched madly through the wild regions of insanity.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

March Marston at Home. — His astonishing Behavior. — Narration of his Extraordinary Adventures. — Widow Marston's Bower. — The Rendezvous of the Trappers. — A strange Interruption to March's Narrative. — A Wild Surprise and Recovery of a Lost Lover. — Great Destruction of Household Goods. — A Double Wedding and Tremendous Excitement. — The Wild Man of the West the Wisest Man in Pine Point Settlement.

THREE months passed away, and at the end of that period March Marston found himself back again in Pine Point settlement, sitting on a low stool at that fireside where the yelling and kicking days of his infancy had been spent, and looking up in the face of that buxom, blue-eyed mother, with whom he had been wont to hold philosophical converse in regard to fighting and other knotty — not to say naughty — questions, in those bright but stormy days of childhood when he stood exactly "two-feet-ten," and when he looked and felt as if he stood upwards of ten feet two!

Three months passed away, and during the passage of that period March Marston's bosom became a theatre in which, unseen by the naked eye, were a legion of spirits, good, middling, and bad, among whom were hope, fear, despair, joy,

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fun, delight, interest, surprise, mischief, exasperation, and a military demon named General Jollity, who overbore and browbeat all the rest by turns. These scampered through his brain and tore up his heart and tumbled about in his throat and lungs, and maintained a furious harlequinade, and in short behaved in a way that was quite disgraceful, and that caused the poor young man alternately to amuse, annoy, astonish, and stun his comrades, who beheld the exterior results of those private theatricals, but had no conception of the terrific combats that took place so frequently on the stage within.

During those three months, March saw many things. He saw his old friends the prairie-dogs, and the prong-horned antelopes, and the grisly bears, and the wolves: more than that, he chased, and shot, and ate many of them. He also saw clouds of locusts flying high in the air, so thick that they sometimes darkened the very sky, and herds of buffaloes so large that they often darkened the whole plain.

During those three months March learned a good deal. He learned that there was much more of every sort of thing in this world than he had had any idea of — that there was much, very much, to be thankful for — that there were many, very many, things to be grieved for, and many also to be glad about — that the fields of knowledge were illimitably large, and that his

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own individual acquirements were preposterously, humblingly, small!

He thought much, too. He thought of the past, present, and future in quite a surprising way. He thought of his mother and her loneliness, of Dick and his obstinacy, of Mary and her sweetness, of the Wild Man of the West and his invisibility. When this latter thought arose, it had the effect invariably of rousing within him demon Despair; also General Jollity, for the general had a particular spite against that demon, and, whenever he showed symptoms of vitality, attacked him with a species of frenzy that was quite dreadful to feel, and the outward manifestations of which were such as to cause the trappers to fear seriously that the poor youth had "gone out of his mind," as they expressed it; but they were wrong — quite wrong — it was only the natural consequence of those demons and sprites having gone into his mind, where they were behaving themselves — as Bounce, when March made him his confidant, said — with "horrible obstropolosity."

Well, as we have said, March was seated on a low stool, looking up in his mother's face. He had already been three days at home, and, during every spare minute he had, he sat himself down on the same stool, and went on with his interminable narrations of the extraordinary adventures through which he had passed while among

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the Rocky Mountains and out upon the great prairies.

Widow Marston — for she knew that she was a widow now, though the knowledge added but little to the feeling of widowhood to which she had been doomed for so many years, — widow Marston, we say, listened to this interminable narration with untiring patience and unmitigated pleasure. There was as yet no symptom of the narrative drawing to a close, neither was there the slightest evidence of the widow Marston becoming wearied. We have seen a cat worried and pulled and poked by its kitten almost beyond endurance, and we have observed that the cat endured it meekly — nay, evidently rejoiced in the annoyance; it was pleasurable pain. As it is with feline, so is it with human mothers. Their love overbears and outweighs *every thing*. Ah! good cause have the rugged males of this world to rejoice that such is the fact; and although they know the fact well, we hold that it is calculated to improve the health and refresh the spirit of men to have that fact brought prominently and pointedly to their remembrance!

Had March Marston talked the most unutterable balderdash, widow Marston would have listened with unwearied delight as long, we believe, as her eyes and ears could do their duty. But March did *not* talk balderdash. For a madman, he spoke a great deal of common, besides a

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considerable amount of uncommon sense, and his mother listened with intelligent interest; commenting on what he said in her quiet way, as she found opportunity — we say this advisedly, for opportunities were not so frequent as one might suppose. March had always been possessed of a glib tongue, and he seemed, as Bounce remarked, to have oiled the hinges since his return to Pine Point settlement.

"Mother," said March, after a short pause that had succeeded an unusually long burst, "do you know it's only a few months since I left you to go to this trip to the Mountains?"

"I know it well, my son," replied the widow, smiling at the question.

"And do you know," he continued, "that it seems to me more like five years? When I think of all that I've heard, and all that I've done, and all that I've seen, it seems to me as if it had took — as if it *must* have took — five years to have heard and done and seen it all in!"

"And yet," said the widow, musingly, "you failed to see the Wild Man o' the West after all."

"Mother, I'll be angry with you if you say that again."

"Well, I won't," she replied, taking his hand in hers and stroking it. "Tell me again, March, about Dick of the Cave and his little girl. I like to hear about them; they were so kind to

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you, and that Dick, from your account, seems to be such a fine fellow; tell me all about them over again."

"I will, mother," said March, clearing his throat, and commencing in a tone that showed clearly his intention of going on indefinitely.

Widow Marston's cottage had a pretty, comfortable-looking flower-garden behind it. In front the windows looked out upon a portion of the native woods which had been left standing when the spot for the settlement was cleared. In the back garden there was a bower which the widow's brother, the blacksmith, had erected, and the creepers on which had been planted by the widow's own hand when she was Mary West, the belle of the settlement. In this bower, which was a capacious one, sat a number of sedate, quiet, jolly, conversible fellows, nearly all of whom smoked, and one of whom sketched. They were our friends Redhand, Bounce, Big Waller, Gibault, Hawkswing, and Bertram.

It is observable among men who travel long in company together in a wild country, that, when they return again to civilized, or to semi-civilized life, they feel a strong inclination to draw closer together, either from the force of habit, or sympathy, or both. On reaching Pine Point the trappers, after visiting their friends and old chums, drew together again as if by a species of electrical attraction. In whatever manner they chanced

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to spend their days, they — for the first week at least — found themselves trending gradually each evening a little before sunset to a common centre.

Widow Marston was always at home. March Marston was always with his mother. Deep in his long-winded yarns. The bower was always invitingly open in the back garden: hence the bower was the regular rendezvous of the trappers. It was a splendid evening that on which we now see them assembled there. The sun was just about to set in a flood of golden clouds. Birds, wild-fowl, and frogs held an uproarious concert in wood and swamp, and the autumnal foliage glowed richly in the slanting beams as it hung motionless in the still atmosphere.

"D'ye know," said Redhand, removing his pipe for a few minutes and blowing aside the heavy wreaths of tobacco-smoke that seemed unwilling to ascend and dissipate themselves, "d'ye know, now that this trip's over, I'm inclined to think it's about the roughest one I've had for many a year. An' it's a cur'ous fact, that the rougher a trip is the more I like it."

Bertram, who was (as a matter of course) sketching, turned over a few leaves and made a note of the observation.

"I guess it was pretty much of a middlin' jolly one," said Big Waller, smoking enthusiastically and with an expression of intense satisfaction on his weather-beaten countenance.

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"An' profitable," observed Bounce, gravely.

"Ah! oui, ver' prof'table," echoed Gibault. "Dat is de main ting. We have git plenty skins, an' have bring hom' our own skins, w'ich I was not moche sure of one or two times."

"True," said Bounce; "that's wot we've got for to be thankful for. Skins is skins; but the skin of a human ain't to be put in the balance wi' the skin o' a beaver, d'ye see?"

Bounce glanced at Hawkswing as he spoke, but the Indian only looked stolid, and smoked solemnly.

"Yes," he continued, "a whole skin's better nor a broken one, an' it's well to bring back a whole one, though I'm not agoin' for to deny that there's some advantage in bringing back other sorts o' skins too, d'ye see, w'ich goes for to prove the true feelosophy of the fact, d'ye see?——"

Bounce paused, in the midst of his mental energy, to take a parenthetic whiff. His thoughts, however, seemed too deep for utterance, for he subsided quietly into a state of silent fumigation.

"What a splendidly picturesque scene!" exclaimed Bertram, pushing back his brigandish hat, in order the better to get a view, at arms length, of his sketch, and compare it with the original.

"Wot's the meanin' o' picter-esk?" inquired Bounce.

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Theodore Bertram looked and felt puzzled. He was not the first man who thought that he knew the signification of terms well, and found himself much perplexed on being suddenly called upon to give a correct definition of a well-known word. While he is laboring to enlighten his friend, we shall leave the bower and return to the hall, or kitchen, or reception-room, — for it might be appropriately designated by any of these terms, — where March is, as usual, engaged in expounding backwoods' life to his mother. We have only to pass through the open door and are with them at once. Cottages in Pine Point settlement were of simple construction; the front door opened out of one side of the hall, the back door out of the other. As the weather was mild, both were wide open.

March had just reached an intensely interesting point in his narrative, and was describing, with flashing eyes and heightened color, his first interview with the "Vision in Leather," when his attention was attracted by the sound of horses' hoofs coming at a rapid pace along the road that led to the cottage. The wood above referred to hid any object approaching by the road until within fifty yards or so of the front door.

"They seem in a hurry, whoever they be," said March, as he and his mother rose and hastened to the door, "an' there's more than one rider, if I've not forgot how to judge by sounds. I should say that there's — HALLO!"

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The exclamation was not natural by any means, for at that moment a very remarkable horseman dashed round the point of the wood and galloped toward the cottage. Both man and horse were gigantic. The former wore no cap, and his voluminous brown locks floated wildly behind him. On they came with a heavy, thunderous tread, stones, sticks, and dust flying from the charger's heels. There was a rude paling in front of the cottage. The noble horse put its ears forward as it came up, took two or three short strides, and went over with the light bound of a deer, showing that the strength of bone, muscle, and sinew was in proportion to the colossal size of the animal. The gravel inside the paling flew like splashing water as they alighted with a crash, and widow Marston, uttering a faint cry, shrank within the doorway as the wild horseman seemed about to launch himself, with Quixotic recklessness, against the cottage.

"*Dick!*" shouted March, who stared like one thunderstruck as the rider leaped from the saddle to the ground, sprang with a single bound to the widow's side, seized her right hand in both of his, and, stooping down, gazed intently into her alarmed countenance. Suddenly the blood rushed violently to her temples, as the man pronounced her name in a low, deep tone, and with a look of wild surprise mingled with terror, she exclaimed,—

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"Louis!"

The color fled from her cheeks, and uttering a piercing cry, she fell forward on the breast of her long-lost lover.

March Marston stood for some time helpless; but he found his voice just as Redhand and the other trappers, rushing through the house, burst upon the scene — "*Dick!*" shouted March again, in the highest pitch of amazement.

"THE WILD MAN O' THE WEST!" roared Bounce, with the expression of one who believes he gazes on a ghost.

"Fetch a drop o' water, one o' you fellers," said the Wild Man, looking anxiously at the pale face that rested on his arm.

Every one darted off to obey, excepting Bertram, who, with eyes almost starting out of their sockets, was already seated on the paling, sketching the scene; for he entertained an irresistible belief that the Wild Man of the West would, as he had already done more than once, vanish from the spot before he could get him transferred to the pages of his immortal book.

Trappers are undoubtedly men who can act with vigorous promptitude in their own peculiar sphere; but when out of that sphere, they are rather clumsy and awkward. Had they been in the forest, each man would have fetched a draught of clear water from the nearest spring with the utmost celerity; but, being in a settlement, they

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knew not where to turn. Big Waller dashed toward a very small pond which lay near the cottage, and dipping his cap into it, brought up a compound of diluted mud and chickweed. Gibault made an attempt on a tiny rivulet with the like success, which was not surprising, seeing that its fountain-head lay at the bottom of the said pond. Bounce and Hawkswing bolted into the cottage in search of the needful fluid, but, being unused to furniture, they upset three chairs and a small table in their haste, and scattered on the floor a mass of crockery, with a crash that made them feel as if they had been the means of causing some dire domestic calamity, and which almost terrified the household kitten into fits.

Then Bounce made a hopeful grasp at a teapot, which, having happily been placed on a side table, had survived the wreck of its contemporary cups and saucers, and the Indian made an insane effort to wrench the top off a butter-churn, in the belief that it contained a well-spring of water.

Of all the party old Redhand alone stood still, with his bald head glistening in the last rays of the sinking sun, and his kindly face wrinkled all over with a sympathetic smile. He knew well that the young widow would soon recover, with or without the aid of water; so he smoked his pipe complacently, leaned against the door-post, and looked on.

He was right. In a few minutes Mrs. Marston

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recovered, and was tenderly led into the cottage by her old lover, Louis Thadwick, or, as we still prefer to call him, the Wild Man of the West. There, seated by her side, in the midst of the wreck and *débris* of her household goods, the Wild Man, quite regardless of appearances, began boldly to tell the same old tale, and commit the same offence, that he told and committed upwards of sixteen years before, when *he* was Louis the Trapper, and *she* was Mary West.

Seeing what was going forward, the judicious trappers and the enthusiastic artist considerately retired to the bower behind the house. What transpired at that strange interview no one can tell, for no one was present except the kitten. That creature, having recovered from its consternation, discovered, to its inexpressible joy, that, an enormous jug having been smashed by Bounce along with the other things, the floor was covered in part with a lakelet of rich cream. With almost closed eyes, intermittent purring, quick-lapping tongue, and occasional indications of a tendency to choke, that fortunate animal revelled in this unexpected flood of delectation, and listened to the conversation; but, not being gifted with the power of speech, it never divulged what was said — at least to human ears, though we are by no means sure that it did not create a considerable amount of talk among the cat-population of the settlement.

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Be this as it may, when the Wild Man at length opened the door, and cried, "Come in, lads — it's all right," they found the widow Marston with confusion and happiness beaming on her countenance, and the Wild Man himself in a condition that fully justified Bounce's suggestion that they had better send for a strait-waistcoat or a pair of handcuffs. As for March, he had all along been, and still was, speechless. That the Wild Man of the West was Dick, and Dick the Wild Man of the West, and that both should come home at the same time in one body, and propose to marry his mother, was past belief, — so of course he didn't believe it.

"Hallo! wait a bit; I do b'lieve I was forgettin'," cried the Wild Man, springing up in his own violent impulsive way, upsetting his chair (as a matter of course, being unused to such delicacies), dashing through the lake of cream to the all but annihilation of the kitten, opening the door, and giving vent to a shrill whistle.

All rushed out to witness the result. They were prepared for any thing now — from a mad bison to a red warrior's ghost, and would have been rather disappointed had any thing feebler appeared.

Immediately there was a clatter of hoofs; a beautiful white pony galloped round the corner of the wood, and made straight for the cottage. Seated thereon was the vision in leather — not

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seated as a woman sits, but after the fashion of her own adopted father, and having on her leathern dress with a pair of long leggings highly ornamented with porcupine-quills and bead-work. The vision leaped the fence like her father, bounded from her pony as he had done, and rushed into the Wild Man's arms, exclaiming, "Be she here, an' well, dear fader?"

"Ay, all right," he replied; but he had no time to say more, for at that moment March Marston darted at the vision, seized one of her hands, put his arm round her waist, and swung her, rather than led her, into his mother's presence.

"Here's Mary, mother!" cried March, with a very howl of delight.

The widow had already guessed it. She rose and extended her arms. Mary gazed for one moment eagerly at her and then rushed into them. Turning sharp round, March threw his arms round Bounce's neck and embraced him for want of a better subject; then hurling him aside he gave another shout, and began to dance a violent horn-pipe on the floor, to the still further horrification of the kitten (which was now a feline maniac), and the general scatteration of the mingled mass of crockery and cream. Seeing this, Bounce uttered an hysterical cheer. Hawkswing, being excited beyond even savage endurance, drew his scalping-knife, yelled the war-cry, and burst into the war-dance of the

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Seneca Indians. In short, the widow's cottage became the theatre of a scene that would have done credit to the violent wards of a lunatic asylum — a scene, which is utterly beyond the delineative powers of pen or pencil — a scene which defies description, repudiates adequate conception, and will dwell forever on the memories of those who took part in it like the wild phantasmagoria of a tremendous dream.

* * * *

Of course, a wild man could not be induced, like an ordinary mortal, to wait a reasonable time in order to give his bride an opportunity of preparing her trousseau. He was a self-willed man, and a man of a strong mind. He insisted upon being married "out of hand, and have done with it." So he *was* married — whether "out of hand" or not we cannot tell — by the excellent clergyman of Pine Point settlement. On the same day, and the same hour, March Marston was married — "out of hand," also, no doubt — to the vision in leather!

There was something rather precipitate in these proceedings, unquestionably; but those who feel disposed to object to them must bear in mind, first, that backwoodsmen are addicted to precipitancy at times; and, secondly, that facts cannot be altered in order to please the fastidious taste of the so-called civilized world.

Public opinion in the settlement was strongly

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in favor of the doings of the Wild Man of the West. Delay was deemed by all to be unnecessary, and all the more so that the double wedding-day was to be celebrated as a species of public event.

The romance connected with the previous life of Dick, and especially his singular and unexpected return to his first love, created quite a sensation, even in a region in which wild deeds and wonderful events were so common that it required a man to be a real hero to enable him to rise conspicuous above his fellows. Many trappers came in from a considerable distance to take part in the rejoicings of that day, and from the dance which followed the ceremony there was not absent a living creature belonging to the settlement.

Every dog was there, of course, adding its vocal melody to the dulcet tones of the blacksmith's violin. Even the cats of the settlement were present, including that celebrated kitten which had been reduced to a state of drivelling imbecility by the furious advent of the Wild Man. Owls and other sagacious birds also came from afar to see the fun, attracted by the light of the fire; for the ball-room was the green sward of the forest, which was illuminated for the occasion by a bonfire that would have roasted a megatherium whole, and also would have

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furnished accommodation for a pot large enough to boil an elephant. Don't think, reader, in the vanity of your heart, that you have conceived that fire! You have not, as a Yankee would say, the most distant conception of the small end of a notion of what it was! A hundred brawny arms, accustomed to wield the broad axe, had lent their aid to rear the mighty pile and feed the ravening flame.

It was kindled on a wide level plot in the outskirts of the settlement, around which the trees spread their sheltering arms. On a plank raised on two casks sat the blacksmith with his fiddle. The carpenter sat beside him with a kettle-drum — more literally a kettle-drum even than the real thing, for that drum *was* a kettle! On a little mound that rose in the centre of the plot sat, in state, Dick and Mary, March and the vision in leather, their respective thrones being empty flour-casks. Around them danced the youth and beauty of the settlement. These were inclosed by a dense circle, composed of patriarchal, middle-aged, and extremely juvenile admirers. The background of the picture was filled up with the monstrous fire which saturated that spot in the forest with light — bright as the broadest day. The extreme foreground was composed of the trunk of a fallen tree, on which sat our friend the artist, delineating the whole with the eager-

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ness of an enthusiast who had *at last* fallen upon a scene truly worthy of his genius.

How Bounce did dance, to be sure! How the young trappers and the blooming backwoods' maidens did whirl and bound, on heel and toe, and, to a large extent, on the whole sole of the foot! Yes, their souls were in the work, and their spirits too; and that although there was not a drop of spirits in the settlement. Happily, owing to the unaccountable delay of a provision-boat, there was not a glass of "fire-water" in the place at that time. The whole affair was got up, carried on, and concluded on tea. It was a great teetotal gathering, which would have drawn tears of joy from the heart of Father Matthew and all his successors, whether Romanist or Protestant, had they witnessed it.

Yet the excitement was tremendous. The Wild Man of the West, strange to say, and, owing to some peculiar contradictoriness of character which was unaccountable, was almost the only sane man of the whole party. He flung himself on the ground beside his wife, and locking his arm round the tough root of a pine-tree refused to budge from the spot. As the united efforts of all the men who could lay hold of him at one time failed to root him up, he was suffered to lie there and amuse himself by watching the dancers, looking up occasionally at Mary's blue

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eyes, and playing with such of the juveniles as he could attract within the reach of his long arm.

As for March Marston, he was mad now if ever he had been so in his life! He danced with all the girls, and wrestled with all the men, and played hide-and-seek with all the boys, and fraternized with all the old people, and chased all the dogs, and astonished, not to say horrified, all the cats. Yet, although he did all this, he did not neglect the vision in leather, by no manner of means.

Long before the dawn of early morning that jovial party drank a parting cup of cold tea, and, dispersing to their several homes, left the field in possession of the village curs.

Now, dear reader — with a feeling of sadness we write — all things must have an end! We make this unquestionable assertion in order to break to you, as gently as may be, the news that our tale has reached its close. Had we taken in hand to write the life and adventures of our hero and his friends, from first to last, we should have had to prepare pens, ink, and paper, for a work equal in size to the "Encyclopædia Britannica." We have detailed one or two episodes in their wild career. What they did, and said, and saw in after years, must be left to future historians, or to the imagination of romantic

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readers. This only will we say in conclusion, that of all the men who dwelt in Pine Point settlement, for many years after the events narrated in these pages, the kindest, the wisest, the gentlest, the heartiest, the wildest, and the most courageous, was — the Wild Man of the West.

THE END

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